

A BIRD of PASSAGE

BY

B. M. CROKER





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A
BIRD OF PASSAGE.

BY
B. M. CROKER,
AUTHOR OF "PROPER PRIDE," "PRETTY MISS NEVILLE,"
"SOME ONE ELSE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

"Such wind as scatters young men thro' the world
To seek their fortunes further than at home,
Where small experience grows."
THE TEMPEST.

SECOND EDITION.

London:
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, & RIVINGTON,
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

1887.

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.
SOME ONE ELSE.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
PORT BLAIR	I

CHAPTER II.

EXPECTATION	19
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS	54
-----------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

MISS DENIS HAS VISITORS	69
-----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

WHAT IS SHE LIKE?	83
-----------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

QUEEN OF THE CANNIBAL ISLANDS	106
---	-----

CHAPTER VII.

MR. QUENTIN'S PIANO	117
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER VIII.

	PAGE
"I WAS HIS DEAREST LIZZIE!" . . .	135

CHAPTER IX.

A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS . . .	154
----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

MR. LISLE FORGETS HIS DINNER . . .	169
------------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI.

THE FINGER OF FATE! . . .	190
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

THE WRECK . . .	209
-----------------	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

"BLUE BEARD'S CHAMBER" . . .	227
------------------------------	-----

A BIRD OF PASSAGE.



CHAPTER I.

PORT BLAIR.

“Droops the heavy-blossom’d bower ; hangs the heavy-fruited tree :

Summer isles of Eden lying in dark purple spheres of sea.”
Locksley Hall.

FEW travellers penetrate to the Andamans, unless it be an enthusiastic astronomer to witness a rare comet, or an enterprising professor, who happens to be fired with a desire to study the language and the skulls of the aborigines.

These islands are as yet sacred from the foot of the globe-trotter, Cook’s tourists ignore them, and they lie in serene semi-savage

seclusion, in the midst of the Indian Ocean, dimly known to the great outer world as the chief Indian convict settlement, and the scene of Lord Mayo's murder in 1872. The inland portions of the great and lesser Andamans have been but cursorily explored, (those who have made the attempt, having learnt by tragic experience that the inhabitants were addicted to cannibalism); but outlying islets, and fringes of the coast, have been opened up by the Indian Government, and appropriated for the benefit of thousands of convicts (chiefly lifers), who are annually poured into Port Blair—from Galle to the Kyber, from Aden to the borders of China, the cry is still they come!

Port Blair, the Government headquarters, is situated on Ross, a high conical islet that lies about a mile south of the Middle Andaman, and although of limited circumference, it boasts a stone church, barracks, a Commandant's residence, several gaols, a pier, a bazaar, a circulating library, and a brass band! Every foot of ground is laid out to

marvellous advantage, and the neat gravelled pathways, thick tropical hedges, flowering shrubs and foliage plants, give the numerous brown bungalows which cover the hill-sides, the effect of being situated in a large and well-kept garden.

The summit of the island commands a wide view: to the north lies the mainland with its sharply indented shores, and a wide sickle-shaped estuary, sweeping far away into the interior, where its wooded curves are lost among the hills; the southern side of Ross looks sheer out upon the boundless ocean, and receives the full force of many a terrible tropical hurricane, that has travelled unspent from the Equator.

There was not a ripple on that vast blue surface, one certain August evening, a few years ago—save where it fretted gently in and out, between the jagged black rocks that surrounded the island; the sea was like a mirror, and threw back an accurate reflection of boats, and hills, and wooded shores; distant, seldom-seen islands, now loomed in

the horizon with vague, misty outlines; a delicate, soft, south wind barely touched the leaves of the big trees, among whose branches the busy green parrots had been chattering, and the gorgeous peacocks, screeching and swinging, all through the long, hot, sleepy afternoon.

Surely the setting sun was making a more lingering and, as it were, regretful adieu to these beautiful remote islands than to other parts of the world! No pen could describe, no brush convey, any idea of the vivid crimson, western clouds, and the flood of blinding golden light, that bathed the hills, the far-away islets, the tangled mangroves, and the glassy sea.

To the cool, dispassionate northern eye, which may have first opened on a leaden sky, snow-capped hills, pine woods, and ploughed lands, there was a general impression of wildly gaudy, south sea scenery, of savage silence, and lawless solitude.

Soon that scarlet ball will have plunged below the horizon, a short-lived grey twilight

have spread her veil over land and sea, the parrots' noisy pink bills will be tucked under their wings, and the turbulent peacocks have gone to roost.

Close to the flag-staff (which was planted on a kind of large, flat mound, at the highest point of the island), one human figure stood out in bold relief against the brilliant sunset ; an elderly gentleman with grizzled hair and beard, a careworn expression, and mild, brown eyes,—eyes that were anxiously rivetted on the at present sailless sea. He carried a small red telescope in his hand, and divided his time between pacing the short grass plateau, and spasmodically sweeping the horizon. For what was he looking so impatiently ? He was looking for the smoke of the Calcutta steamer, that brought mails and passengers to Port Blair once in every six weeks. Think of but one mail in six weeks, ye sybarites of Pall Mall, revelling in a dozen daily posts, scores of papers, and all the latest telegrams from China to Peru ! Imagine reading up forty days' arrears of

your *Times* or *Post*; imagine six *Punches* simultaneously! Gladly as Colonel Denis usually hailed his letters, and especially the *Weekly Gazette*, yet it was neither news or promotion that he was so restlessly awaiting now—his thoughts were altogether centred on a passenger, his only daughter, whom he had not seen for thirteen years, not since she was a little mite in socks and sashes, and now she was a grown-up, a finished young lady, coming out from England by this mail to be the mistress of his house! He was glad that this long anticipated day had dawned at last, and yet he scarcely dared to analyze his own feelings—he was ashamed to own, even in his inmost heart, that mingled with all his felicity, there is a secret dread—a kind of stifled misgiving. This girl who is to share his home within the next few hours, is in reality, as far as personal acquaintance goes, as much a stranger to him as if he had never seen her before, although she is his own little Nell, with whom he used to romp by the hour in the

verandah at Karkipore, thirteen years ago. Those thirteen years stand between him and that familiar merry face, dancing gait, and floating yellow hair, they have taken that away, and what are they going to give him instead? Of course he and his daughter had corresponded by every mail, but what are nice affectionate letters, what are presents, yea photographs, when the individuality of the giver has long been blurred and indistinct; when the memory of a face, and the sound of a voice, have faded and faded, till nothing tangible remains but a name! Children of five years old have but short memories, and in Helen Denis's case, there was no one near her to revive her dying recollections.

"I wonder if she will know me among the crowd," her father muttered as he paced the platform, with the telescope behind his back.

"I'm sorry now, I never had my photo taken, to prepare her! How strange I shall feel with a girl in the house, after all these years. I've quite forgotten woman's

ways!" From an expression that came into his eyes, one might gather that a backward glance at "woman's ways" was not altogether one of the most agreeable memories of the past. "If she should be like—" and he paused, shuddered, and looked out over the sea for some minutes, with a face that had grown suddenly stern. His thoughts were abruptly recalled to the present, by the sound of footsteps coming up the gravel pathway behind him.

"Hullo, colonel!" cried a loud, cheery voice, "why are you doing sentry here? Oh! of course, I forget; you expect Miss Denis this mail!"

"Yes. I'm looking out for the steamer," he replied, as he turned round and accosted a very handsome young man, with aquiline features, brilliant teeth, and eyes as blue as the surrounding sea. A tall young man, carefully dressed in a creaseless light suit, who wore a pale silk tie run through a ring, gloves, and carried a large white umbrella. He had an adequate appreciation of his own

appearance, and with good reason, for men frequently referred to him as "the best-looking fellow of their acquaintance," and women—well—women spoiled him, they had petted him and made much of him, since he was a pretty little curly-headed cherub, with a discriminating taste in sweets, and a rooted objection to kissing old and ugly people, down to the present time, when he (although you would not think it), had passed his thirty-second birthday! He had been sent to Port Blair in connection with some new works on the mainland, and was "acting" for another man, who had gone on furlough. His name was James—variously known as "Beauty," "Apollo," or "Look and Die"—Quentin, and he was really less conceited than might have been expected under the circumstances! Mr. Quentin was not alone; his companion was a shorter, slighter, and altogether more insignificant person, dark as an Arab, through exposure to the sun; he wore a broad-leafed, weather-beaten Terai, pulled so far over his brows, that one could

only guess at a pair of piercing eyes, a thin visage, and a black moustache; his clothes were by no means new, his hands burnt to a rich mahogany, and innocent of gloves, ring, or umbrella.

Somehow, with his slouched hat, slender figure, and swarthy skin, he had rather a foreign air, and was a complete contrast to his broad-shouldered patron, "Look and Die" Quentin, whom he followed slowly up the hill, and muttering an indistinct greeting to Colonel Denis, he walked on a few paces, and stood with his arms folded, looking down upon the sea, somewhat in the attitude of the well-known picture of Napoleon at St. Helena! This sun-burnt, silent individual was known by the name of "the Photographer;" he was a mysterious stranger, who three months previously had dropped into the settlement—but *not* into society—as if from the clouds, and during these three months, the united ingenuity of the community had failed to discover anything more about him, than what they had learned the very first day he had landed

on Ross ; to wit, that his name was Lisle, and that he had come from Calcutta to take photographs among the islands. Immediately after his arrival, he had established himself in the Dâk Bungalow, on Aberdeen, had hired a boat, and in a very short time had made himself completely at home ; his belongings consisted of a small quantity of luggage, a large camera, some fishing-tackle, and a native servant, who refused to elucidate any one on the subject of his master, and the public were very inquisitive about that gentleman,—and who shall say that their curiosity was not legitimate !

People never came to Ross, unless they were convicts, settlement officers, formed part of the garrison, or were functionaries like Mr. Quentin, who was “acting” for some one else. Mr. Lisle did not come under any of these heads ; he was not an officer, Hindoo or otherwise, he did not belong to the settlement, nor was he one of the class for whose special behoof the islands had been colonized. The problem still re-

mained unsolved, who was Mr. Lisle, what was he doing at Port Blair, where did he come from, when, and where, was he going, was he rich or poor, married or single? All these queries still remained unsolved, and opened up a fine field of speculation. Society, so isolated from the outer world, so meagrely supplied with legitimate news, were naturally thrown a good deal upon their own resources for topics of conversation, and discussion. A week after mail-day, most of the papers had been read and digested, and people had to fall back upon little items of local intelligence—and such items were wont to be scarce: think, then, what a godsend for conjecture and discussion Mr. Lisle would, and did prove! this waif blown to them from beyond the sea, without address or reference! If he had been a common-looking, uneducated person, it would have been totally different; but the aggravating thing was, that shabby as were his clothes, he had the unmistakable bearing and address of a gentleman,—yet

he spent all his days photographing natives, trees, islands, as if his daily bread solely depended on his industry! He lived not far from where Mr. Quentin dwelt, in a splendid bungalow, in solitary state; and the former, constantly meeting the photographer, had scraped up an acquaintance with him, had dropped in and smoked friendly cigarettes in the Rest House verandah, had thrown out feelers in vain—in vain!—had come to the conclusion that Lisle was a very gentlemanly fellow in his way,—that he was no fool, that he was a most entertaining companion, and wound up by insisting that he should come and share his roof!

To this Lisle objected, in fact he refused the invitation point-blank, but when he learned that the Rest Bungalow was requisitioned for some missionaries, and when his would-be host became the more pressing, the more he was reluctant, he gave in, after considerable hesitation.

“You see, it’s not a purely unselfish idea,” said Mr. Quentin; “I’m awfully lonely at

this side—not a soul to speak to, unless I go to Ross, and I'm often too lazy to stir, and now I shall have you to argue with, and to keep me company of an evening. Then, as to your photographs, there's lots of room for them. You can have a whole side of the house to yourself, and do as you please."

"I'll come on one condition," replied the other, looking straight at him; "I'll come, if you will allow me to pay my share of the butler's account, and all that sort of thing. We are speaking quite frankly—you require some one to talk to, I want a roof, since you say the missionaries are coming to the Rest House,—and I doubt if we would assimilate!"

Mr. Quentin, who had been lounging in a low cane chair, took his cigar out of his mouth, blew a cloud of smoke, and hesitated; it was all very well to have this chap up to keep him company of an evening, but to chum with him—by Jove!

The other seemed to read what was

passing through his mind, for he said, with a twinkle in his eye,—

“I’m not a fellow travelling for a firm of photographers, as no doubt every one imagines. I’m”—pushing an envelope over to his companion—“that’s my name.”

Mr. Quentin took up the paper carelessly, cast his eye over it, became rather red, and laughed nervously. From this time forward, Mr. Lisle and Mr. Quentin chummed together on equal terms,—somewhat to the scandal of their neighbours, who were amazed, that such a fastidious man as “Look and Die” Quentin, should open his house, and his arms, to this unknown shabby stranger! His manners were studiously courteous and polite, but he understood how to entrench himself in a fortress of reserve, that held even Mrs. Creery, the chief lady of Port Blair, at bay, and this was saying much—driven very hard, two damaging statements had been, as it were, wrested from him! he liked the Andamans, because there was no daily post, and no telegrams, and he

had no occupation *now*. Did not admission number one, savour of a dread of suggestive-looking blue envelopes, and clamouring, hungry creditors—to whom he had effectually given the slip; and admission number two was worse still! no occupation now, was doubtless the result of social and financial bankruptcy. Mrs. Creery was disposed to deal hardly with him—in her opinion, he was an “outlaw.” (She rather prided herself upon having fitted him neatly with a name.) If he had thrown her one sop of conciliation, or given her the least little hint about himself and his affairs, she *might* have tolerated him, but he remained perversely dumb. Mr. Quentin was dumb too—though it was shrewdly suspected that he knew more about his inmate than any one—and indeed he had gone so far as to deny that he was a professional photographer; when rigidly cross-examined by a certain lady, he only laughed, and shook his head, and said that “Lisle was a harmless lunatic—rather mad

on the subject of photography and sea-fishing, but otherwise a pleasant companion ;” but beyond this, he declined to enlighten his questioner. No assistance being forthcoming, society was obliged to classify the stranger for themselves, and they ticketed him as a genteel loafer, a penniless ne’er-do-well, who had come down to Port Blair in hopes (vain) of obtaining some kind of employment, and had now comfortably established himself as Mr. Quentin’s hanger-on, and unpaid companion !

It must be admitted that the stranger gave considerable colour to this view ; he did not visit and mix with society on Ross, he wore shabby clothes and shocking hats, and spent most of his time tramping the bush with a gun on his shoulder or a camera on his back—“ looking for all the world like an Italian organ-grinder or a brigand,” according to that high authority, Mrs. Creery. For three months he had been without a competitor in the interest of the community, but now his

day was over, his star on the wane, he was about to give place to a very rare and important new arrival, namely, an unmarried lady, who was currently reported to be “but eighteen years of age, and very pretty !”

CHAPTER II.

EXPECTATION.

“For now sits expectation in the air,
And hides a sword.”

Henry V.

ALL this time Colonel Denis had been engaged in animated conversation with Mr. Quentin. Nature had been doubly generous to the latter gentleman, for she had not merely endowed him with unusual personal attractions, but had increased these attractions, by the gift of a charming manner that fascinated every one who came in contact with him—from the General himself, down to the sullen convict boatmen; it was quite natural to him, even when discussing a trivial subject, with an individual who rather bored him than otherwise, to throw such an appearance of interest into his words and looks that one would

imagine all his thoughts were centred in the person before him, and the topic under discussion.

To men this attitude was flattering, to women irresistible, and what though his words were writ on sand, his manner had its effect, and was an even more powerful factor in his great popularity, than his stalwart figure, and handsome face. At the present moment, he stood leaning on his furled umbrella, listening with rapt attention to what Colonel Denis had to say on the subject of whale-boats *versus* gigs (every one on Ross kept a boat of their own like the O'Tooles at the time of the Flood). The colonel was enlarging on the capabilities of his new purchase,—bought expressly in honour of his daughter, as he would have bought a carriage elsewhere,—when he was interrupted by Mr. Lisle (who meanwhile had been keeping watch on the horizon, and whistling snatches of the overture to “Mirella” under his breath), abruptly announcing, “Here she is!”

Colonel Denis was so startled, that he actually dropped the telescope, which rolled to his informant's feet, who, picking it up, noticed, as he returned it, that Colonel Denis was looking strangely nervous, and that the hand stretched towards him was shaking visibly. He gazed at him with considerable surprise, and was about to make some remark, when Mr. Quentin exclaimed in a tone of genuine alarm, "By George, here is Mrs. Creery. I see the top of her topee coming up the hill, and I'm going."

But he reckoned without that good lady, who had already cut off his retreat. In another moment her round florid face appeared below the topee, followed by her ample person, clad in a sulphur-colour sateen costume, garnished with green ribbons; last, but not least, came her fat, yellow-and-white dog, "Nip," an animal that she called "a darling," "a treasure," "a duck," and a "fox-terrier," but no other person in the settlement, recognized him by any of these titles. Before she was within twenty yards

she called out in a thin, authoritative treble,—

“Well, what are you all doing here? what is it, eh? Any news? You need not be looking for the *Scotia*; she can’t possibly be in till to-morrow, you know—I told you so, Colonel Denis. Oh,” in answer to a silent gesture from Mr. Lisle, “so *She is* coming in, is she?” in a tone that gave her listeners to understand that she had no business to be there, contradicting Mrs. Creery!

“And so you have been up playing tennis at the general’s,” to Mr. Quentin. “I saw your peon going by with your bat and shoes; but what has brought *you* over to Ross, Mr. Lisle—I thought you rarely left the mainland?” fastening on him now for that especial reason.

“I don’t often come over,” he replied, parrying the question.

“You’ve been shopping in the bazaar,” she continued; “you have been buying collars.”

Mrs. Creery is unanswerable—she is gifted

with "second sight." (All the same it was not collars, but cartridges, that he had purchased.)

"Not she!" returned the lady with a laugh, "but she has eyes in her head, and that's a collar-box in your hand! I can tell most things by the shape of the parcel. Still as charmed as ever with Aberdeen?"

Mr. Lisle bowed.

"I heard that you were going away?"

"So I am—" he paused, and then added, "some day."

"What do you do with all your photographs, sell them? Oh, but to be sure you can't do that here. You must find the chemicals terribly costly."

"They are rather expensive."

"I'll tell you what, I will give you a little commission! How would you like to come over some morning, and take me and Nip, and then the bungalow, and then a group of our servants?"

If Mr. Lisle's face was any index of his mind, it said plainly that he would not relish the prospect at all!

“ I want to send home some photos to my sister, Lady Grubb ;—of course I shall pay you, that’s understood.”

During this conversation, Colonel Denis had looked miserably uncomfortable, and Mr. Quentin as if it was with painful difficulty that he restrained his laughter ; the travelling photographer alone was unmoved ; he surveyed his patroness gravely, as if he were taking a mental plate of her topee with its purple puggaree, her little eager light eyes, her important nose and ruddy cheeks, and then replied in a most deferential manner,—

“ Thank you very much for your kind offer, but I am not a professional photographer.”

Was Mrs. Creery crushed ? Not at all, she merely raised her light eyebrows and said,—

“ Oh, not a professional photographer ! then what *are* you ? ”

“ Mrs. Creery’s very humble slave,” bowing profoundly.

“Photographs are rather a sore subject with him just now,” broke in Mr. Quentin in his loud, hearty voice. “You have not heard what happened to him yesterday when he was out shooting?”

“No, how should I,” she retorted peevishly.

“Well, I must say he bore it like a stoic. I myself, mild as I am, and sweet as you know my temper to be, would have killed the fellow.”

“What fellow—?”

“My new chokra. Time hung heavily on his hands, and I suppose he thought he would be doing something really useful for once in his life, so he went into the room where Lisle keeps all his precious plates—photographic plates, not even printed off—plates he has collected and treasured like so many diamonds—”

“Well, well, well?” tapping her foot.

“My dear lady, I’m coming to it, if you won’t hurry me. My confounded chokra took them all for so much DIRTY GLASS, and

washed every man Jack of them, and was exceedingly proud of his industry ! ”

“ And what did you do to him ? ” demanded Mrs. Creery, turning round and staring at the victim of ignorance.

“ Nothing,—what could I do ? he knew no better, but I told my fellow not to let him come near me for a few days.”

“ Colonel Denis,” said the lady, now addressing him, “ Is it true that you have not seen your daughter for thirteen years ? ”

“ Yes, quite true, I am sorry to say.”

“ Why did you not go home on furlough ? ”

“ I never could manage it. When I could get home, I had no money, and when money was plentiful, there was no leave.”

“ Ah, and you told me she was a pretty girl, I believe ; I hope you are not building on *that*, for pretty children are a delusion, I never yet saw one of them, that did not grow up plain.”

“ Excepting *me* ! Mrs. Creery,” expostulated Mr. Quentin ; “ if history is to be believed, I was a most beautiful infant—so

beautiful that people came to see me for miles and miles around and (insinuatingly) I'm sure' you would not call me plain now?"

Mrs. Creery (who had a secret partiality for this gentleman) laughed incredulously, and then replied, "Well, perhaps you are the exception that proves the rule. Of course," once more addressing Colonel Denis, "your daughter will bring out all the new fashions, and have no end of pretty things—that is if you have given her a liberal outfit."

She here paused for a reply, but no answer being forthcoming went on, "If you feel at all nervous about meeting her, I'll go on board with you with pleasure, I should *like* it, and you are well enough acquainted with me, to know that you have only to say the word!"

At this suggestion, the eyes of the two bystanders met, and exchanged a significant glance, and whilst Colonel Denis was stammering forth his thanks and excuses, they hastily took leave of Mrs. Creery, and made their escape.

“The steamer is coming in very fast, and I think I’ll go home and see that everything is ready,” said the Colonel after a pause.

“Well, perhaps it would be as well,” acceded the lady; “but are you really certain that you would not like me to meet her, or at any rate to be at your bungalow to receive her?”

Once more her companion politely but firmly declined her good offices, assuring her earnestly that they were quite unnecessary, and the lady, visibly disappointed, said as she shouldered her parasol, and turned away, “Perhaps you will have your journey for nothing! I should not be the least surprised if she did not come by this steamer after all! and mark my words, that ayah—that Fatima—that you would engage in spite of my advice will give you trouble *yet!*” [Exit.

Colonel Denis, nothing daunted, hurried down to his own bungalow, a large one facing the mainland, entirely surrounded by a deep verandah, and approached by a pathway

hedged with yellow heliotrope. A good many preparations had been made for the expected young mistress, there were flowers everywhere in profusion, curious tropical ones, berries, and orchids, and ferns.

The lamps were lit in the sitting-rooms, and everything was extremely neat,—and yet there was a want, there was a bare, gaunt look about the drawing-room, although it had been lately furnished, and Ram Sawmy, the butler of twenty years' standing, had disposed the chairs and tables in the most approved fashion—in his eyes—and put up coloured purdahs and white curtains, all for “Missy Baba.” Nevertheless, the general effect was grim and comfortless. There were no nick-nacks, books, or chair-backs: there certainly were a few coarse white antimacassars, but these were gracefully arranged according to Sawmy's taste as coverings for the smaller tables! Colonel Denis looked about him discontentedly, moved a chair here, a vase there, then, happening to catch a glimpse of himself in a mirror, he went up to it and

anxiously confronted his own reflection. How wrinkled and grey he looked ! he might be fifteen years older than his real age. After a few seconds, he took up and opened a small album, and critically scanned a faded photograph of a gentleman in a long frock-coat, with corresponding whiskers, leaning over a balustrade, his hat and gloves carelessly disposed at his elbow—a portrait of himself, taken many years previously.

“ There is no use in my thinking that it’s the least like me *now*, she could not know me again—no more than I would know her—” then closing the book with a snap, and suddenly raising his voice, he called out,—

“ Here, Sawmy, see that dinner is ready in half an hour, and have the ayah waiting ; I’m going for missy.”

Doubtless dinner and the ayah had a long time to wait, for it was fully an hour before the *Scotia* dropped anchor off Ross ; she was immediately surrounded by a swarm of boats, including that of Colonel Denis, who

boarded her, and descended among the crowd to the cabin, with his heart beating unusually fast.

The cabin lamps were lit, and somewhat dazzled the eyes of those who entered from the moonlight. There were but few passengers, and the most noticeable of these was Helen Denis, who sat alone at the end of the narrow table, with a bag on her lap, the inevitable waterproof over her arm, and her gaze fixed anxiously on the door leading from the companion ladder. Colonel Denis would not be disappointed, his daughter *had* fulfilled the promise of her youth, and was a very pretty girl. She was slight and fair, with regular features and quantities of light-brown hair—hair that twenty years ago was called fair, before golden and canary-coloured locks came to put it out of fashion. Her eyes were grey—or blue—colour rather uncertain ; but one thing was beyond all dispute, they were beautiful eyes ! As for her complexion, it was extremely pale at present, and her very lips were white ; but this was

due to her agitation, to her awe and wonder and fear, to her anxiety to know *which* of the many strange faces that came crowding into the cabin, was the one that would welcome her, and be familiar to her, and dear to her, as long as she lived? She sat quite still, with throbbing heart, surveying each new-comer with anxious expectation; as Colonel Denis entered, she half rose; and looked at him appealingly.

“You are Helen?” he said in answer to her glance.

“Oh, father,” she exclaimed tremulously, now putting down the bag and stretching out her hands, “how glad I am that you are *you*!—it sounds nonsense, I know, but I was half afraid that I had forgotten your face. You know,” apologetically, “I was such a very little thing; and that man over there, with the hooked nose, stared at me so hard, that I thought for a moment, I was half afraid—” and she paused, and laughed a little hysterically, and looked at her father with eyes full of tears, and he, rather shyly stooped

down and touched her lips with his grizzly moustache—and the ice was broken.

Helen seemed to immediately recover her spirits, her colour, and her tongue—but no, she had never lost the use of that! She was a different-looking girl to what she had been ten minutes previously! her lips broke into smiles, her eyes danced, she was scarcely the same individual as the white-faced, frightened young lady whom we had first seen sitting aloof at the end of the saloon table.

“I remember you now quite well,” said Miss Denis. “I knew your voice. And, oh, I am so glad to come home again!”

This was delightful. Colonel Denis, a man of but few words at any time, was silent from sheer necessity now. He felt that he could not command his utterance as was befitting to his sex. If this meeting was rapturous to Helen, what was it not to him? Here was his own little girl grown into a big girl—this was all the difference.

In a short time Miss Denis and her

luggage (Mrs. Creery would be pleased to know that there was a good deal of the latter) were being rowed to Ross by eight stout-armed boatmen, over a sea that reflected the bright full moon. It was almost as light as day, as Helen and her father walked along the pier, and up the hill homewards ; as they passed a bungalow on their left hand, the figure of a girl (who had long been lying in wait, in the shadow of the verandah,) leant out as they went by, and watched them stealthily ; then pushing open a door, and hurrying into a lamp-lit room, she said to her mother, an enormously stout, helpless-looking woman,—

“She has come ! She has a figure like a maypole. I could not see her face plainly, but I don’t believe she is anything to look at.”

However, those who had already obtained a glimpse of Miss Denis in the saloon of the *Scotia* were of a very different opinion, and, according to them, the newly-arrived “spin” was an uncommonly pretty girl, likely to

raise the average of ladies' looks in the settlement by about fifty per cent. !

Almost at the moment that Colonel Denis and his daughter were landing on Ross, another boat was putting her passengers ashore on Aberdeen, i.e. Mr. Quentin's very smart gig. A steep hill lay between him and his bungalow, but declining the elephant in waiting, he and Mr. Lisle, and another friend, to whom he had given a seat over, commenced to breast the rugged path together. This latter gentleman was a Dr. Parks, the principal medical officer in the settlement ; a little man with a sharp face, grey whiskers and moustache, and keen eyes to match ; he was comfortable of figure, and fluent of speech, and prided himself on having the army list of the Indian staff corps at his fingers' ends ; he could tell other men's services to a week, knew to a day when Brown would drop in for his off-reckonings, and how much sick-leave Jones had had. More than this, he had an enormous circle of acquaintances in the three

Presidencies, and if he did not know most old Indian residents personally, at any rate he could tell you all about them—who they married, when, and why; who were their friends, enemies, or relations; what were their prospects of promotion, their peculiarities, their favourite hill-stations;—he was a sort of animated directory (with copious notes), and prided himself on knowing India as well as another man knew London. He was unmarried, well off, and lived in the East from choice, not necessity; he was exceedingly popular in society, was reputed to have saved two lacs of rupees, and to be looking out for a wife!

After climbing the hill for some time in silence, Dr. Parks paused—ostensibly to survey the scene, in reality to take breath.

“Hold hard, you fellows,” he cried, as the other two were walking on. “Hold hard, there’s no hurry. Looks like a scene in a theatre, doesn’t it?” waving a hand towards the prospect below them.

“With the moon for lime-light?” rejoined Mr. Quentin as he paused and glanced back upon the steamer, surrounding boats, and the sea, all bathed in bright, tropical moonshine; at the many lights twinkling up and down the island,—like fire-flies in a wood.

Dr. Parks remained stationary for some seconds, contemplating Ross, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. At length he said,—

“I daresay old Denis hardly knows himself to-night, with a girl sitting opposite him. I hope she will turn out well.”

“You mean that you hope she will turn out good-looking,” amended Mr. Quentin, turning and surveying his companion expressively. “Ah, Parks, you were always a great ladies’ man!”

“Nonsense, sir, nonsense. I’m not thinking of her looks at all; but the fact of the matter is, that Denis has had an uncommonly rough time of it, and I trust he is in shallow water at last, and that this girl will

turn out to be what they call 'a comfort to him.'"

"I hope she will be a comfort to us all? I'm sure we want some consolation in this vile hole; but why is Old Denis a special charity?" inquired Mr. Quentin.

"*Old* Denis—well, he is not so old, if it comes to that; in fact, he is five years my junior, and I suppose *I'm* not an old man, am I?" demanded Dr. Parks, with a spark of choler in his eye.

"Oh, you! you know that you are younger than any of us," rejoined Mr. Quentin quickly; "time never touches you; but about Denis?"

"Oh! he has had a lot of bother and worry, and you know that that plays the deuce with a fellow. The fact of the matter is, that Tom Denis came to awful grief in money-matters," said Dr. Parks, now walking on abreast of Mr. Quentin, and discoursing in a fluent, confidential tone.

"His father's affairs went smash, and Tom became security to save the family name,

mortgaged all his own little property that came to him through his mother, exchanged from a crack regiment at home, and came out here into the staff corps. It was a foolish, quixotic business altogether; no one was a bit obliged to him: his sisters thought he might have done more, his father was a callous old beggar, and took everything he got quite as a matter of course, and Tom was the support of his relations, and their scape-goat."

"The very last animal I'd like to be," remarked Mr. Quentin; "but don't let me interrupt you; go on."

"Well, as if Tom had not enough on his hands, he saddled himself with a wife—a wife he did not want either, a beautiful Greek! It seems that she burst into tears when he told her he was going to India, and I'm not sure that she did not faint on his breast into the bargain. However, the long and the short of it was, that Tom had a soft heart, and he offered to take her out with him as Mrs. D——.

“Mrs. Denis had a lovely face, an empty head, no heart, and no money; in fact, no interest, or connections, or anything! and she was the very worst wife for a poor man like Tom. She came out to Bombay, and carried all before her; one would have thought she had thousands at her back—her carriages, dresses and dinners! ’pon my word, they ran the Governor’s wife pretty hard. There was no holding her; at least, it would have taken a stronger man than Tom Denis to do that. She flatly refused to live on the plains, or to go within five hundred miles of his native regiment; and his *rôle* was to broil in some dusty, baking station, and to supply my lady up in the hills, or spending the season at Poonah or Bombay, with almost the whole of his pay.—I believe she scarcely left him enough rupees to keep body and soul together!”

“The man must have been a fool!” said Mr. Lisle emphatically, now speaking for the first time.

“Aye, a fool about a pretty face, like

many another," growled the doctor. "There was no denying her beauty! The pure Greek type; her figure a model, every movement the poetry of motion. She was cockney born, though; her father a Greek refugee, conspirator, whatever you like, and of course, a Prince at Athens, and the descendant of Princes, according to his own tale—meanwhile a fourth-rate painter in London, whose Princess kept lodgers! Well, Mrs. Denis was very clever with her pen, and made capital imitations of her husband's signature! She borrowed freely from the Soucars, she ran bills in all directions, she had a vice in common with her kinsfolk of Crete, and she was the prettiest woman in India! Luckily for Denis (I say it with all respect to her ashes), she died after a short but brilliant social career, leaving him this girl, and some enormous debts. The fact of the matter was, Tom was a ruined man.—And all these years, between his father's affairs and his wife's liabilities, his life has been a long

battle, and poor as he was, and no doubt *is*, he never could say no, to a needy friend; and I need scarcely tell you, that people soon discovered this agreeable trait in his character!"

"It's a pity he has not a little more moral courage, and that he never studied the art of saying 'no,'" remarked Mr. Lisle dryly; "it's merely a matter of nerve, and practice."

"It's not that, exactly," rejoined Dr. Parks, "but that he is too much afraid of hurting people's feelings, too simple and unselfish. I hope this girl who has come out, will stand between him and this greedy world!"

"I should have thought it ought to be the other way."

"So it ought, but you see what Denis is yourself," turning and appealing to Jim Quentin. "Go over to him to-morrow morning, and tell him that you are at your wits' ends for five hundred rupees, and he will hand it out to you like a lamb."

“I only wish lambs *were* in the habit of handing out five hundred rupee notes, I’d take to a pastoral life to-morrow!” returned Mr. Quentin fervently, casting a woeful thought to the many long bills he owed in Calcutta, London, and elsewhere.

“Let us hope Miss Denis will have some force of character,” said Dr. Parks; “that’s the only chance for him! A strong will, like her mother’s, minus her capabilities for making the money fly, and a few other weaknesses; and here,” halting and holding out his hand, “our roads part.”

“No, no. Not a bit of it,” replied Mr. Quentin, taking him forcibly by the arm. “You just come home and dine with us, doctor, and tell a few more family histories.”

Dr. Parks was a little reluctant at first, declaring that he was due elsewhere, that it was quite impossible, &c., &c.

“It’s only the Irwins, I know, and they will think you have stopped at Ross—it will be all right. Come along.”

Thus Dr. Parks was led away from the path

of duty, and down the road approaching Mr. Quentin's bungalow;—he was rather curious to see the ménage; that was the reason why he had been such an unresisting victim to Mr. Jim's invitation,—Mr. Jim rarely entertained, and much preferred sitting at other people's boards, to dispensing hospitality at his own.

Dinner was excellent—well cooked, well served. Dr. Parks, who was not insensible to culinary arts, was both surprised and pleased; he had known his host for many years, had come across him on the hills and on the plains, on board ship, and in the jungle; they had a host of acquaintances in common, and after a few glasses of first-rate claret, and a brisk volley of mutual reminiscences and stories, Dr. Parks began to tell himself that “he was really very fond of Apollo Quentin, after all, and that he was one of the nicest young fellows that he knew!” And what about the man who sat at the foot of the table? Hitherto he had not been able to classify this Mr. Lisle, nor

had he been so much interested in the matter, as other, and idler, people. He had seen him often coming and going at Aberdeen, and had nodded him a friendly "Good-morrow," and now and then exchanged a few words with him; his clothes were shabby, his manner reserved; Dr. Parks understood that he was a broken down gentleman, to whom Quentin had given house-room, and, believing this, he could not help feeling that he was performing a gracious and kindly action in noticing him, and "doing the civil," as he would have called it himself, to this beggarly stranger! But now, when he came to look at the fellow, his appearance was changed. What wonders can be worked by a decent coat! Seen without his slouch hat, and rusty Karki jacket, he was quite another person; and query, was that reserved manner of his *humility*? Dr. Parks noticed that there was nothing subservient in his way of speaking to Quentin; quite the reverse; that far from holding a subordinate position in the estab-

lishment, servants were more prompt to attend on him, than on any one else, and sprang to his very glance; that he, more than Quentin, looked after his (Dr. Parks') wants, and saw that his plate and glass were always replenished to his liking, in which duties Apollo (who was a good deal occupied with his own dinner and speculations on Miss Denis's appearance,) was rather slack. When the meal was over, and the silent, bare-footed servants had left the room, cigars and cigarettes were brought out, and conversation became general, Mr. Lisle had plenty to say for himself—when he chose—had travelled much, and had the polished manners and diction of a man who had mixed with good society. Dr. Parks scrutinized him narrowly, and summed up his age to be a year or two over thirty—he looked a good deal younger without his hat; his hair was black as the traditional raven's wing, slightly touched with grey on the temples, his eyes were deep-set, piercing, and very dark, there was a humorous twinkle in them at times,

that qualified their general expression—which was somewhat stern. On the whole, this Lisle was a handsome man; in quite a different style to his *vis-à-vis* Apollo (who lounged with his arm over the back of his chair, and seemed buried in thought), he was undoubtedly a gentleman, and he looked as if he had been in the service. All the same, this was but idle speculation, and Dr. Parks had not got any “forrader” than any one else.

The pause incident to “lighting up” lasted for nearly five minutes, then Mr. Quentin roused himself, filled out a bumper of claret, pushed the decanter along the table, and said,—

“Gentlemen, fill your glasses. I am about to give you a toast. Miss Denis—her very good health.”

“What!” to Dr. Parks. “Are you not going to drink it. “Come, come, fill up, fill up.”

“Oh, yes. I’ll honour your toast, I’ll drink it,” he replied, suiting the action to the word. “And now I’ll follow it up

by what you little expect, and that's a speech."

"All right, make a start, you are in the chair; but be brief, for goodness' sake. What is the text?"

"The text is, Do not flirt with Miss Denis."

"Oh, and pray why not, if she is pretty, and agreeable, and appreciative?"

"You know what I told you this very evening. She is a mere school-girl, an inexperienced child, she is Denis's one ewe lamb, she is to be his companion, the prop of his old age; if you have any sense of chivalry, spare her."

"Spare her!" ejaculated Mr. Quentin with a theatrical gesture of his hand. "One would think I was a butcher, or the public executioner!"

"I know," proceeded Dr. Parks, "your proclivities for tender whisperings, bouquet-giving, and note-writing, in short the whole gamut of your attentions, and that they never *mean* anything, but too many forlorn

maidens have learnt to their cost, you most agreeable, but evasive young man," nodding towards his host with an air of pathetic expostulation.

"I say, come now, you know this is ridiculous," exclaimed Mr. Quentin, pushing his chair back as he spoke. But Dr. Parks was in the vein for expounding on his friend's foibles, and not to be silenced.

"You know as well as I do your imbecile weakness for a pretty face, and that you cannot resist making love to every good-looking girl you see, until a still better-looking drives her out of your fickle heart."

"Go on, go on," cried his victim; "you were a loss to the Church."

"Of course," continued the elder gentleman, clearing his throat, "I can readily imagine that for you—a society man before anything—these regions are a vast desert, you are thrown away here, and are figuratively a castaway, out of humanity's reach. And now fate seems induced to smile upon you once more, in sending you a possibly pretty

creature to be the sharer of your many empty hours. If I thought you would be serious, I would not say anything; or if this girl was a hardened veteran of a dozen seasons, and knew the difference between jest and earnest, again I would hold my peace; but as it is, I sum up the whole subject in one word, and with regard to Helen Denis, I say, *don't*."

"Hear hear," cried his friend, hammering loudly on the table. Doctor, your eloquence is positively touching; but you always *were* the ladies' champion. All the same you are exaggerating the situation, I am a most innocent, inoffensive—"

"Come now, James Quentin; how about that girl at Poonah that you made the talk of the station? How about the girls you proposed to up at Matheran and Murree; what about the irate father who followed you to Lahore, and from whom you concealed yourself behind the refreshment-room counter? Eh!"

"Now, now, doctor, I'll cry peccavi. Spare me before Lisle."

Who lay back in his chair smoking a cigar, —and looking both bored and indifferent.

“ *You* don’t go in for ladies’ society on Ross ?” said Dr. Parks, addressing him abruptly.

“ I—no—” struggling to an erect posture, and knocking the ash off his cigar. “ I only know one lady over there, and she is a host in herself.”

“ You mean Mrs. Creery ?”

“ Yes, I allude to Mrs. Creery.”

And at the very mention of the name, they all three laughed aloud.

“ And how about Miss Denis, Quentin ? you’ve not given your promise,” said Dr. Parks once more returning to the charge.

“ I’ll promise you one thing, doctor,” drawled the host, who was beginning to get tired of his persistence. “ I’ll not marry her, now that you have let me behind the scenes about her bewitching mother, and I’ll promise you, that I’ll go over and call to-morrow, and see if I can discover any traces of a Grecian ancestry in Miss Denis’s face and figure.”

"You are incorrigible. I might as well talk to the wall; there's only one hope for the girl, and that's a poor one."

"Poor as it is, let us have it."

"A chance that she may not be taken, like twenty-three out of every two dozen, with fickle Jim Quentin's handsome face!"

"Where has Lisle gone to?" he added, looking round.

"Into the verandah, or to bed, or out to sea! The latter is just as likely as anything; he did not approve of the conversation, he thinks that ladies should never be discussed," and he shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Quite one of the old school, eh?" said the elder gentleman, raising his eyebrows and pursing out his under-lip.

"Quite," laconically.

"By-the-bye, Quentin, I daresay you will think I'm as bad as Mrs. Creery, but *who* is this fellow Lisle, and what in the name of all that's slow is he doing down here?—eh, who is he?" leaning over confidentially.

"Oh, he fishes, and shoots, and likes the

Andamans awfully.—As to who he is,—he is simply, as you see, a gentleman at large, and his name is Gilbert Lisle.”

Thus Dr. Parks, in spite of his superior opportunities, was foiled ; and returned to his own abode, no wiser than any of his neighbours.

CHAPTER III.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

“And I am something curious, being strange.”

Cymbeline.

THE morning after her arrival Helen Denis found herself alone, as her father was occupied with drills and orderly-room till twelve o'clock, when they breakfasted.

She went out into the verandah, and looked about her, in order to become better acquainted with the situation of her new home. The bungalow stood a little way back from the gravel road, that encircled the whole island, and was shaded by a luxuriant crimson creeper; a hedge of yellow flowers bordered the path leading up to the door, and between the house and the sea, was a clump of thick cocoa-nut palms, that stood out in bold relief against the deep cobalt background

of the sky. Jays, parrots, and unfamiliar tropical birds were flitting about, and from the sea a faint breeze was wafted, bearing strange, fragrant odours from the distant mainland; a light haze lay over the water, betokening a warm meridian. A few white clouds slumbered in the hot heavens overhead; and save for the hum of insects and birds, and a distant sound of oars swinging to and fro in the rowlocks, the place was as silent as a Sunday morning in the country, when every one has gone to church.—At first Helen stood, and then she sat down on the steps to contemplate this scene, which formed the prelude to a new epoch in her life—she gazed and gazed, and seemed afraid to move her eyes, lest the vision should escape her. She sat thus without moving for fully half an hour.

“ Well, what do you think of it all, young woman ? ” from a voice behind her, caused her to spring up, and she found her father standing there, in his white uniform, with his sword under his arm.

“ Oh, papa ! I never, never saw anything like it ; I never dreamt or fancied there could be such a beautiful spot—it’s like fairyland ! like an enchanted country, like ” —her similes running short—“ like Robinson Crusoe’s island.”

“ Rather different to Brompton, eh ? I suppose you had not much of a view there ? ”

“ View ! ” she exclaimed ; “ if there had been one, we could not see it ; for in the first place we were shut in by high, dirty brick walls, and in the second, all the lower windows were muffled glass ; there was one window at the end of the schoolroom that overlooked the road, and though it was pretty high up, it was all painted, but some one had scratched a little space in it, right in the middle, and often and often, when I’ve been saying my lessons, or reading translations in class, every idea has been sent right out of my head, when I’ve looked up at that pane and seen an *eye* watching us—it always seemed to be watching *me* ! but of course that was imagination ; it used to make me

feel quite hysterical at times, and many a bad mark it cost me ! ”

“ Well, you are not likely to get any bad marks here,” said her father, laying his hand on her shoulder as he spoke ; “ and you think you will like Port Blair ? ”

“ Like—why it seems to me to be a kind of paradise ! I wonder half the world does not come and live here,” she replied emphatically.

To this remark ensued a rather long silence, a silence that was at length broken by a noise as strange to Helen’s ears, as the lovely scene before her was to her still admiring eyes ; this noise was a loud, fierce, hoarse shout, something like an angry cheer. She glanced at her father with a somewhat heightened colour, and in answer to her startled face he said,—

“ Those are the convicts ! they leave off work at twelve o’clock, they are busy on the barracks just now. Stay where you are, and you will see them pass presently.”

The approach of the convicts was he-

ralded by a faint jingling of chains that gradually became louder and louder; and in a few moments the gang came in sight, escorted by four burly, armed warders. Helen drew back, pale and awe-struck, as she watched this long, silent procession, file past, two and two, all clad in the same blue cotton garment, all heavily manacled, otherwise there was but little resemblance among them. There passed, the squat Chinaman, chained to the tall, fiery Pathan, (who flung as he went by, a glance of bitter hatred and defiance at the two European spectators); they were in turn followed by a brace of tattooed Burmans, who seemed rather cheerful than otherwise; then a few mild Hindoos, then more Arabs, more Burmans, more fierce Rohillas, more mild Hindoos!

Helen stood almost breathless, as they glided by, nor did she speak, till the very last sound of clanking chains had died away in the distance.

“Poor creatures! I had forgotten *them*!”

she said ; “ this place is no paradise to ‘ a prisoner.’ ”

“ Poor creatures ! ” echoed her father, “ the very scum and sweepings of her Majesty’s Indian Empire—poor murderers, poor robbers, poor dacoits ! ”

“ And why are they in chains ? such heavy cruel-looking chains ? ”

“ Because they are either recent arrivals or desperate characters, the former probably ; the worst of the ‘ poor creatures ’ are not kept in Ross, but colonized in other gaols on the mainland, or at Viper.”

“ And are there many here on Ross ? ”

“ About four thousand, including women, but some of these, have tickets-of-leave, and only go back to ‘ section’—*section* is a delicate way of putting it—at night ; many of them are our servants.”

“ *Our* servants, papa ! ”

“ No, I am speaking of the settlement, but our boatmen, our water-carrier, and—I may as well break it to you at once—our cook, are each and all, people who have a

past, that does not bear close inquiry ! And now, my dear, shall we go in to breakfast ? ”

It was a delightful change from his usual solitary meal, to have that bright, pretty face sitting opposite to him ; he watched her intently for some minutes—she was pouring out tea with all the delight of a child.

“ I’ve never done it before, papa ! ” she exclaimed as she despatched his tea-cup ; “ be sure you don’t let Sawmy know, or he will despise me.—Of course being at school, I never got a chance. Miss Twigg herself presided over the hot-water, and then in the holidays I had much better tea, but I never made it.”

“ Ah, your holidays, Helen, that is what puzzled me so much about your Aunt Julia. I understood that you were always to spend your vacation with the Platts.”

“ I did once, when I was small ; and I do not think they liked me, so after a lapse of five years they tried me again—I suppose to see if I was improved, but these

holidays were even *worse* than the others. I have a quick temper, and I got into fearful trouble."

"How?"

"Oh, it's a very old story, and I hope and trust, that I have more command of my feelings now. I remember I was in the room at afternoon tea, rather by accident, for I usually took that refreshment in"—lowering her voice to a stage whisper—"the kitchen! My cousins are a good deal older than I am—they were grown up then, I perfectly recollect, though they declare they were *not*—"

"Well, but it is not a question of your cousins' age, but of some domestic fracas that you were about to tell me."

"Yes, I'm always wandering from the point. I recollect it was a Sunday afternoon, some gentlemen were calling, and they noticed me, and talked to me, and I was flattered, and doubtless pert; they asked Cousin Clara who I was, and where I, and my classic profile came from? and Aunt Julia told them

that I was her poor brother's child, and added something about—about—no matter."

Helen had never heard a word with regard to her other parent, save that she was a beautiful Greek, who had died young. Her picture she had seen, and this in itself was sufficient, for her to idealize her, and adore her memory—for Azalie Denis, had the face of an angel! "She—no, I won't tell you what she said! but I have never forgotten it; in a passion of rage and scarcely knowing what I was doing, I snatched up a cup of scalding tea, and flung it in Aunt Julia's face. Yes! cup and all! You may imagine the commotion; you can believe that I was in disgrace. I was led solemnly from the room, and locked away in a lumber-closet upstairs, where I remained for the rest of my vacation. Each day I was asked to apologize, and each day I said '*I won't,*' so there I stayed, till I went back to school. Ere leaving, I was taken down to my aunt's apartment, and told that I was a wicked, bad, abominable child, and that I would come to an untimely end; and then

Cousin Clara took up a pair of big scissors, and seizing my beautiful thick plait of hair, sawed, and hacked it off, close to the nape of my neck ! ”

“ What ! cut off your hair ! ” exclaimed Colonel Denis, roused to sudden animation.

“ Yes ; though I screamed and struggled, it was of no use, I well remember the appearance of my poor pigtail in Clara’s hand ! Well ! after *this* you will not be surprised to hear, that I was never asked to Upper Cream Street again,—and I was not sorry. I never could get on with Aunt Julia ; I’m so glad that *you* are not a bit like her, papa ! She used to make me shake in my shoes.”

“ And how do you know that I won’t do the same ? ” he asked with a smile.

“ I’m sure you won’t ! Have another cup of tea, do please.”

“ It’s strange that we have so few relations,” he said, obediently passing his cup as he spoke. “ Besides your Aunt Julia, there’s only my sister Christina,—she has been an invalid for years, and never writes.”

“Is not she married to a queer Irishman who lives at a place with a ridiculous name—Crow-more? And Aunt Julia won’t have anything to do with her?”

“Yes, your Aunt Julia did not approve of the match. This Sheridan was a kind of professor, that Christina met abroad, a most dreamy, unpractical genius, with a magnificent head, and a brogue that you could cut with a hatchet. After living for some years in a small German town, they went over to Ireland, and there they reside on a property that was left to him. I write now and then” (and he might have added, enclose a cheque), “but Christina never sends me a line.—I’m afraid they are very badly off,” shaking his head as he stirred his tea.

“Now tell me something about this delightful place, papa! I’ve been reading a good deal about it, I mean the Andamans. They were first taken possession of in 1789 by the British Government, or rather East India Company, were abandoned in 1796,

and resumed in 1858, the year after the Mutiny; don't I know it all nicely?"

"You know a great deal more about it than *I* do."

"This is Ross, is it not?"

"Yes, the other settlements are scattered about. People come over here to church, to shop, to play tennis, and to hear the news."

"And are there many other people—I don't mean convicts and soldiers?"

"There are about fifty men, and fifteen or sixteen ladies. No doubt you will have a good many visitors to-day."

"Oh, papa! you don't mean it—not to call on *me*?"

"Yes, of course; who else would they come to see?"

"It makes me feel quite nervous, the palms of my hands are cold already; only six weeks ago I was doing French composition and German translation, and not daring to speak above my breath without leave. And now all at once I am grown up! I am to receive visitors, I may wear

what I like, and," with an interrogative smile across the table, "do as I *please*?"

"As long as you don't throw cups of tea at people, my dear."

"Now, papa, I'm very sorry I mentioned that, if you are going to use it against me! But, do tell me something about the fifteen ladies,—and who are likely to come and call?"

"Well, there is Mrs. Creery; she is the wife of the head of the Foolscap Department, and lives close to this. She—well," hesitating, "she is a very energetic woman, but her"—hesitating again—"manner is a little against her! rather arbitrary, you know, but we all have our faults.—Then there is Mrs. Caggett; her husband has some trade with Burmah, and his wife lives here in preference to Moulmein. Miss Caggett is our only young lady, and"—rather dubiously—"you will see what you think of *her*. Mrs. Home is the wife of the colonel of this regiment—I'm only second

fiddle you know; you are certain to have a kind friend in her. Then there is Mrs Durand, wife of Captain Durand of the European detachment herè; she is away just now, and a great loss to the place. There are several ladies at out-stations, whom you are sure to like."

"I wish I was sure that they would like *me*," rejoined his daughter in rather a melancholy voice. "You must bear in mind, that I am not accustomed to the society of grown-up people, and I know that I have *no* conversation!"

"*No* conversation! and pray what have we been having for the last three-quarters of an hour?"

"Oh, that is quite different. I can talk away to you by the week, but with strangers what can I discuss?—not even the weather, for I don't know what happens here; it's always fine, I suppose?"

"You will find plenty to say, I'll engage," returned her father with emphasis, "and I

have no doubt—" whatever he was going to add, was cut short by the imperious rapping of an umbrella on the wooden steps of the verandah, and a shrill female voice calling " Boy ! "

CHAPTER IV.

MISS DENIS HAS VISITORS.

“What’s his name and birth? I cannot delve him to the root.”

Shakespeare.

“THERE is Mrs. Creery!” exclaimed Colonel Denis, starting up rather nervously. “She has come to call *first*. Don’t keep her waiting.” To Helen, who was hastily smoothing her hair and pulling out her ruffles, “You will do first-rate; go into the drawing-room, my dear.”

“Yes, but not alone, papa!” taking him by the arm. “You will have to introduce us, you must come with me.”

You see she had begun to say *must* already!—Colonel Denis was by no means reluctant, to present his pearl of daughters to the visitor who had prognosticated that she would be plain, and he was sufficiently human, to enjoy that lady’s

stare of stolid astonishment, as she took Helen's hand, and kept it in hers for quite a minute, whilst she leisurely studied her face.

"How do you do, Miss Denis? had you a good passage?"

"Very good, thank you," replied the young lady demurely.

"I see," sitting down as she spoke, and specially addressing Colonel Denis, "that you have had new curtains, and *!purdahs*, put up, and have actually bought that white marble table, that Kursandoss had so long on hand! How much did you give for it?"

"One hundred rupees," replied the purchaser in a guilty voice.

"Heavens and earth!" casting up hands and eyes, "did any one ever hear of such folly! it is not worth *thirty*. Miss Denis, it's a good thing that you have come out to look after your father, he is a most extravagant man!"

Helen thought that this was a pleasantry, and laughed immoderately. Mrs. Creery was

really most amusing,—but how oddly she was dressed ! She was quite old, in Helen's eyes (in truth she was not far from fifty), and yet she was attired in a white muslin polonaise trimmed with rose-coloured bows, and wore a black sailor's hat, with the letters *Bacchante* stamped in gold upon the ribbon ! Meanwhile the elder lady had been taking a great deal of interest in Miss Denis's pretty morning-dress ; she had come to the conclusion that the pattern was too complicated to be what is called “carried away in her eye,” and was resolved to ask for it boldly,—and that before she was many days older !

“You may go up to the mess,” she said, playfully dismissing her host with a wave of her plump, mittened hand. “I want to have a chat with your daughter alone. I came to see her—*you* are no novelty !”

“Now, my dear, we shall be quite comfortable,” she said, as Colonel Denis meekly took his departure. “Did you find him much changed ?” she continued, lowering her voice mysteriously.

“A little, but not”—smiling—“*nearly* as much changed as I seem to him!”

“How much is he going to allow you for the housekeeping?”

Helen assured her questioner that the subject had not even been considered. Mrs. Creery on hearing this was visibly disappointed, and said rather tartly,—

“Well, don’t listen to anything under five rupees a day—you could not do it less. The Durands spend that! The Homes *say* they manage on four, but that’s nonsense, and the children could not be half fed. Maybe your father will still leave it to Ram Sawmy, but”—with sudden energy—“you must not hear of that—the man is a robber!”

“He has been twenty years with papa,” ventured Helen.

“So much the worse for your father’s *pocket*,” returned Mrs. Creery emphatically. “I suppose you have brought out a number of new gowns? What have you got?”

“I have a white silk, and a black silk,” replied Helen with some exultation in her

own mind, for they were her first silk dresses.

“Both perfectly useless here!” snapped the matron.

“A riding-habit.”

“Stark, staring madness! There’s not a horse between this and Calcutta—unless a clothes-horse! What else?”

“A cashmere and plush costume.”

“You may just send it back to England, or throw it away.”

Helen paused aghast.

“Well, well—go on, go on—that’s not *all*, surely?”

“I have some pretty cottons and muslins, and a tennis-dress.”

“Come, that’s better, and when are your boxes to be opened?”

“This afternoon, if possible.”

“Oh, well, I’ll come down and see your things to-morrow, I may get some new ideas, and we are a little behindhand with the fashions here,” waving once more her mit-tened hand. “And now to turn to another

subject! It's a great responsibility for a young girl like you to be placed at the head of even a *small* establishment like this! I am older than you are" (it was quite superfluous to mention this fact), "I know the world, and I wish to give you a word of caution."

Helen became crimson.

"I hope you are a steady, sensible girl."

"I hope so, Mrs. Creery," raising her chin in a manner well known to Miss Twigg,—a manner betokening insurrection.

"There now, don't be huffy! I mean to be your friend. I would have come down and stayed here for the first week or two, to set you going, if your father had asked me, as you have no lady in the house; however, I've spoken to him most seriously. All the men in the place will of course be flocking to call, and turning your head with their silly compliments. As a rule they are not a bad set of young fellows; but Mr. Quentin and Captain Rodney are the only two, who *I* should say were in a position to marry,—the

others are just paupers. Butterflies! Oh, and yes"—here her voice became hollow and mysterious—"I must put you on your guard against a Mr. Lisle."

"A Mr. Lisle!" echoed Helen, opening her eyes very wide.

"Yes, Lisle, don't forget the name. He seldom comes over, he lives at Aberdeen with Mr. Quentin—lives *on* him I should say," correcting herself sharply. "He came here a few months ago—goodness knows from where. It is generally believed that he is in *hiding*—that he is under a cloud; he is poor as a rat, has no visible means of livelihood, and is as close as wax about his past. However, Mr. Quentin shields him, keeps his secret, and there is nothing more to be said except this—don't *you* have anything to say to him, he may have the impudence to call, but indeed, to give him his due, he does not push. It is a most unpleasant feeling, to have this black sheep living in the neighbourhood at all, I wish he was well out

of the settlement!" shaking her head expressively.

Helen, amazed at Mrs. Creery's volubility, sat staring at her in speechless surprise. Why should she take such pains to warn her against a man, who she admitted did not push, and whom she was not likely to see? Another knocking in the verandah, and a rather timid voice calling "Boy!" announced the arrival of a second visitor, and Mrs. Creery rose, saying,—

"You will be coming up to the General's tennis this evening, and we shall meet again, so I won't say good-bye," then casting one last searching glance round the apartment, she, as if seized by some after-thought, hurried across, coolly pulled back the purdah (door-curtain), and looked into the dining-room. "Nothing new *there*, I see," dropping the drapery after a long, exhaustive stare; "nothing but a filter! Well, *au revoir*," and nodding approvingly at Helen, she finally took her departure.

The new arrival was a complete contrast to the parting guest; a pale, faded, but still pretty little woman, with imploring dark eyes (like a newly-caught fawn), attired in a neat white dress, a solar topee, and respectable gloves. She was Mrs. Home, the wife of Colonel Denis's commanding officer, and the mother, as she plaintively informed Helen, of no less than nine children!

"They make me so dreadfully anxious, dear Miss Denis, especially the seven at home. I live on tenter-hooks from mail-day to mail-day. Imagine my feelings when they were *all* in measles last spring!"

But this was a feat beyond Helen.

"You have two here?" she asked politely, after a pause.

"Yes, Tom and Billy. Your father is so fond of them, and they wanted so much to come and see you. But I told them you would think them a trouble—and the first call too!"

Helen eagerly assured her visitor that they

would have been most welcome, and rushing impulsively out of the room, returned with a box of chocolate-creams she had purchased for her own delectation ; which she sent to the young gentlemen with her best love, requesting that they would come and call as soon as possible. This gift, and message, completely won their mother's heart. At first she had been a little doubtful, a little in awe, of this pretty, fashionable-looking girl, but now she became much warmer in manner, and said,—

“ You know, my dear, I'm not a society lady, I have no time for gaiety, even if I were fitted for it ; between sewing for my boys and girls at home, and my letters, and my housekeeping, not to mention Tom and Billy, I never seem to have a spare moment. I came down here early on purpose, hoping to be the *first* to welcome you, but I was late after all ! ” and she smiled deprecatingly. “ Your father is such a very dear friend of ours, that I feel as if I had a kind of claim on you, and hope you won't stand on cere-

mony with us, but come to see us as often as you can. Will you?"

"I shall be very glad indeed, thank you."

"You see, you and I being the only ladies in the 'Puggarees' too,—it is a kind of bond, is it not? If I can help you in any way about your housekeeping, be sure you let me know, won't you! I am an old campaigner of fifteen years' standing, and everything, of course, is quite new to you. You and your father, I hope, will come up and dine with us quietly to-morrow night, and then you and I can have a very nice long chat."

Helen thanked Mrs. Home for her invitation, and said that if her father was not engaged, she was sure they would be most happy to accept it.

"And now, my dear," said the little lady, rising, "I must really go! the Dhoby has been waiting for me at home this half-hour, I know, and I have all the clean clothes to sort, so I will wish you good-bye. May I kiss you?" holding Helen's hand, and look-

ing at her with timid, appealing eyes. Helen became rather red, but smiled assent, there-upon the salute was exchanged, and Mrs. Home presently took her departure.

After this visit, there was a long interval. Colonel and Miss Denis were equipped and ready to start for the General's tennis-party, when Sawmy brought in another card; a small one this time, bearing the name of "Mr. James Quentin." The card was almost instantly followed by that gentleman, looking as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox. Having cordially wrung his host's hand, and been presented to his daughter, he seated himself near the young lady, placed his hat on the floor, and commenced to discuss the climate, her passage, &c., surveying the new arrival critically at the same time. "She was much prettier than he expected," he said to himself as he summed her up; "her profile was not classical, but it would pass; her eyes were fine in shape and colour, though their expression was rather too merry for *his* taste; he imagined

that she had plenty of spirits, and but a meagre supply of sentiment. Her complexion was perfect, but of course *that* would not last three months!" On the whole, he was most agreeably surprised, and her dainty dress, and ladylike deportment, were as refreshing to his eyes, as a spring of water to a traveller in the desert! The shape of her hat, the fit of her long gloves, her brilliant colour, and pure English accent, all mentally carried him back to the Park once more—his Mecca! Yes, the fall of Miss Denis's draperies, the very lace in her ruffles, were each a source of gratification to her visitor, who had a keen eye for such things, and was a connoisseur in toilettes. He told himself emphatically that this young lady was "no end of a find!" but, aloud, he politely inquired if Colonel and Miss Denis were going up to the tennis. They were. Well, he was going too—a sudden resolution—and might he be permitted to accompany them?

Mr. James Quentin felt an additional

sense of importance, as he strolled up the narrow path towards the General's grounds, personally conducting Miss Denis (coolly leaving her father to bring up the rear alone, as the pathway was too narrow to permit of three abreast), and he honestly believed, that the young lady beside him, could not be launched into settlement society, under happier, or more distinguished, auspices.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT IS SHE LIKE ?

“So sweet a face, such angel grace,
In all that land had never been.”

HELEN found her reception a most trying ordeal. She was very cordially welcomed by the General, who instantly came forward to meet her, and escorted her towards Mrs. Creery; she ran the gauntlet of two groups of men, who were standing on the tennis-ground, ostensibly discussing the recent mail, but naturally watching the new arrival, who was the cynosure of every eye, as she passed by; and approached a row of seats on which the ladies—a still more formidable phalanx—were seated in state. Mrs. Creery (who occupied the social throne in the shape of a stuffed arm-chair) now rose majestically, and, like Cedric the

Saxon, advanced two steps, saying in her most dulcet company voice, "Very glad you have come, Miss Denis, I am *charmed* to welcome you to Port Blair!"

Helen blushed vividly. Was this august, this almost regal, individual, the same who had questioned, exhorted, and warned her, a few hours previously? She could scarcely believe it! But this was merely her ignorance. That visit had been made in a private capacity, here Mrs. Creery was in a public and responsible position—that of chief lady of the station.

She now took Helen's hand in hers, and proceeded to present her to her immediate circle.

"Mrs. Caggett, let me introduce Miss Denis."

Mrs. Caggett rose, made a kind of plunge, intended for a curtsy, and subsided again, muttering incoherently.

"Miss Denis, Mrs. Graham. Mrs. Graham is our musician. She sings and plays most beautifully!"

Mrs. Graham, who was a pretty brunette, with lovely teeth, shook hands with Helen, and smiled significantly, as much as to say, "You must not mind Mrs. Creery."

"Miss Denis, Mrs. King.—Mrs. King has a nice little girl, and lives at Viper."

"Miss Denis, Mrs. Logan, our authoress." Poor Mrs. Logan blushed till the tears came into her eyes, and said,—

"Oh, Mrs. Creery, *please* don't."

"Nonsense, nonsense! Miss Denis, she has written the *sweetest* poetry—one really exquisite ode, called, let me see, 'The Lifer's Lament,' and numbers of charming sonnets! You must get her to read them to you, some day."

Alas for Mrs. Logan! who in a moment of foolish expansiveness had mentioned her small poems (under the seal of secrecy) to another lady, and had, to her horror, "awoke and found herself famous!"

"Mrs. Manners, Miss Denis," and she paused, as if deliberating on what she could possibly say for Mrs. Manners?

“Please don’t mind about *me*, Mrs. Creery,” exclaimed that lady. “You know that I neither play, nor sing, nor write poetry.”

Mrs. Manners was a sprightly person, regarded by Mrs. Creery with suspicion and dislike, and she now glowered on her menacingly.

“I am very glad to see Miss Denis, and I hope she will overlook my numerous deficiencies!” quoth Mrs. Manners unabashed.

All the ladies had now been, as it were, “told off,” excepting Miss Caggett, who approached and squeezed Helen’s fingers, and looked up in her face, and said,—

“So *thankful*, dear, that you have come! It’s so wretched for me, being the only girl in the settlement. You can’t think how I have been looking forward to *this*,” another squeeze.

Miss Lizzie Caggett was small in person (and mind) and had a very pretty little figure, black hair, bright, reddish-brown eyes, an ugly nose, and an almost lipless mouth, gar-

nished with beautiful teeth. She had been born in India, had had three years at school in England, and been "out" for a considerable number of seasons. She danced like a sylph, talked Hindostani like a native (and it was whispered that she gossiped with her ayah in that language), dressed extravagantly, was as lively as a Frenchwoman, and sufficiently nice-looking to be considered a beauty—where she was the only unmarried lady among fifty men.

She had a shrewd eye to the main chance, and never allowed her feelings to betray her, save, alas ! in the case of James Quentin !

He, from sheer lack of something to do, had been wont to spend his idle hours in Miss Caggett's society. She was amusing and lively, and said such deliciously spiteful things of other women, and told capital stories, accompanied by vehement gesticulation with her tiny hands. She had also a nice little voice,—and it came to pass that they sang duets together, and walked on the pier by moonlight alone !

Mr. Quentin meant nothing, of course, and at first Lizzie quite understood this, but by degrees her strong foothold of common sense slipped away from under her feet, and she fell desperately in love with the blue-eyed gay deceiver, and naturally tried to convince herself that it was mutual! She steeled herself to see him pay a little attention to the rising sun—Miss Helen Denis—they would *all* do that, but when the novelty had worn off, things would right themselves, and fall back into their old places—meaning that Mr. Quentin would fall back into his, i.e. at her side. Mrs. Creery had previously broken the news to her that “Helen Denis was nice-looking, and beautifully dressed,” but she was by no means prepared for the face, and figure, she beheld coming up the walk; and James Quentin in attendance *already*,—actually before she was twenty-four hours on the island! However, she made a brave struggle, and bit her lips, and clenched her small hands, and broke into a smile. She had made up her mind to be the bosom friend

(outwardly), and, if possible, the confidant of this tall, shy-looking Denis girl !

After all, who could expect her to be pleased, to see a young and pretty rival monopolizing every one's attention, and thrusting her into the background ?

When all the introductions had been effected, a game of tennis was got up, and a number of little Andamese boys, in white tunics and scarlet caps, came forward from some lurking-place, to field the balls ; and the settlement band, which was stationed at the end of the plateau, struck up their latest waltz, and presently the entertainment was in full swing. Every one played tennis, even Mrs. Creery, who was old or young as it suited her at the moment—old enough to ask questions, to give advice, and to lay down the law, and to be treated with unquestioning deference and deep respect ; sufficiently young to waltz, to wear sailor hats, and to disport herself at tennis. Helen had been the championess player at Miss Twigg's, and played well. Lizzie Caggett's sharp eyes noted this,

and after a little while she challenged her to a single set there and then.

Vainly did Helen decline to pick up the gauntlet, vainly did she beg to be excused; Mrs. Creery threw the weight of her authority into the scale, and the match was to come off immediately.

"A capital idea, a match between the two girls," she remarked to the General; "there will just be time for it before tea."

Before Helen could realize her position, a ball was thrust into her hand, a crowd had gathered around, and she alone stood *vis-à-vis* to Lizzie Caggett on the tennis-ground. It was one thing to play in Miss Twigg's back-garden, with no spectators but Miss Twigg's girls, but quite another affair when one of the principals in a contest, before forty complete strangers, and pitted against a determined-looking antagonist, who knew every inch of the courts, and was firmly resolved to try conclusions with this brilliant visitor!

And so the match began, the assembled bystanders watching each game intently, and

hanging expectant on the issue of each stroke. The excitement grew intense, for the ladies were well-matched, the play was brilliant, and the games hard fought. Helen served well, and had a longer reach of arm than her challenger, but the other played with an energy, a vivacity, and if one might say so, a spitefulness,—as if the issue of the contest, was a matter of life and death. She scored the first game, Helen the second, and third, and during a rally in the latter, the new arrival was loudly clapped. This incited Miss Caggett to extraordinary exertions. She played with redoubled fire, her teeth were set, her eyes gleamed across the net, she served as though in hopes that she would strike her opponent in the face; she flitted up and down her court, springing and bounding, like a panther in a cage! Her style was by no means graceful, but it was effectual, during the last two games she wearied out Helen, with her quick, untiring onslaught, playing the final, and conquering game, with an exuberance of force, that was almost

fierce ! When it was over, she threw down her bat and clapped her hands, and cried,—

“ Oh, I knew I could beat you.” This was not, strictly speaking, polite, but her triumph was so great, she really could not refrain from this little song of victory. In her own heart, she had made a kind of test of the match, and told herself that, if she conquered the new-comer in *this*, she would be invincible in other things as well !

After this exciting struggle, tea and refreshments were served in a rustic summer-house. Mrs. Creery’s dog Nip—who had occupied his mistress’s chair as deputy, and eyed the cake and bread and butter with demure rascality,—was now called upon to vacate his place, whilst his owner dispensed tea and coffee, and servants carried round cakes and ices. As Helen was partaking of one of the latter, her late antagonist accosted her and said,—

“ Come and take a turn with me, dear. All the men are having ‘pegs,’ and I do so want to have a chat with you.”

“Well,” now taking her arm affectionately, “tell me what you think of the place?”

“I think it is beautiful,” returned Helen with enthusiasm. “I’ve never seen anything like it. Of course I’ve seen very little of the world, and am not a good judge, but I scarcely think that any scenery could surpass it,” glancing over towards Mount Harriet as she spoke, and dreamily watching the peacocks sailing homewards.

This speech was a disappointment to Miss Caggett, who was in hopes that she would have called it an “unearthly, outlandish, savage hole, a gaol!” And then she would have imparted this opinion to the settlement at large,—and such an opinion would have scored a point against Miss Helen.

“Oh,” she replied, “you won’t think it delightful always. It’s frightful in the monsoons, that is in the rains, you know. And how do you like the people?”

“I scarcely know them yet.”

“Well, at least you know Mr. Quentin,” eyeing her sharply.

“Yes, I have known him an *hour*,” she replied with a laugh.

“He is nice enough,” speaking with assumed nonchalance, “but as you can see, awfully conceited, isn’t he?”

Helen did not fall into the trap; if she had, Miss Caggett would have lost no time in giving Apollo the benefit of Miss Denis’s impressions with regard to him!

She only said, “Is he?” and, leaning her elbows on the wooden railing that fenced in the edge of the cliff, looked down upon the sea.

“A great many men are here from Aberdeen and the out-stations,” proceeded Miss Caggett, with a backward jerk of her head, “but they did not come over altogether to see *you*.”

“I should hope not indeed,” returned Helen, reddening.

“No, the mail is in, so they kill two birds with one stone,” continued the other, coolly. “They are not a bad set, though they may seem rough and unpolished to you, don’t they?”

“Really, I am no judge; I have scarcely ever spoken to a gentleman in my life.”

“Gracious!” ejaculated Miss Caggett.
“You weren’t in a convent?”

“No; but what amounted to the same thing, I spent all my holidays at school.”

“Oh, *how* slow for you! Well, you will find this rather a change. There is Dr. Malone, an Irishman, and very amusing, he has any amount of impudence, and has thought of a lovely name for Mrs. Creery—Mrs. Query—isn’t it splendid? We all call her that, for she never stops asking questions, and we all have to answer them whether we like it or not—all but one; there is the person, she never gets anything out of, he is too close even for her, and clever—I grant him that,—much as I detest him!”

“And who is this clever man that baffles Mrs. Creery?”

“A Mr. Lisle, a genteel loafer, a hanger-on of Mr. Quentin’s; he actually has not got the money to pay his passage back to Calcutta, and so he is obliged to stay. His manners

are odious, polite to rudeness, if you know what that means? and he has eyes that seem to look down into your inmost thoughts, and laugh at what they see there! I hate him, though he is extremely anxious to be civil to me, and, in fact, I don't mind telling you in confidence, that he is a great *admirer* of mine,—but it's by no means mutual. Whatever you do, have nothing to say to him. I need not tell you, that *I* never speak to him!”

“We cannot permit you two young ladies to monopolize each other in this fashion,” said the General, approaching with a telescope in his hand. “Would you like to look at some of the islands through this glass, Miss Denis? I can introduce you to several this fine clear evening. Havelock looks quite close!”

“It seems to be very large,” she said, after a long struggle with the focus.

“Well, yes, it is; we will take you there some day in the *Enterprise* if you like. The *Enterprise* is the station steamer.”

“Thank you, I should like it very much

indeed, if it is *safe*—I mean, if the people are safe,” she replied rather anxiously.

“Oh! you will see very little of the natives. They are a curious set; it is almost impossible to get at them, or to tame them.”

“Have you ever tried?”

“Yes; we once had a young fellow from Havelock, as it happened; we showed him every kindness, gave him the best of food, loaded him with beads and every old tall hat on the island, but it was all of *no* use; he just fretted like a bird in a cage, and regularly pined away of home sickness.—He used to sit all day long, gazing, gazing over the sea in the direction of his home, and one morning when they went to see him, they found him sitting in his usual attitude, his face turned towards Havelock—quite dead!”

“Poor, poor fellow!” said Helen, with tears in her eyes; “how *could* you be so cruel, how could you have had the heart to keep him?”

“My dear young lady, it was not a matter of heart, but of duty.”

Mr. Quentin's quick ear caught the significant word *heart*. Surely the General was never going to enter the lists against him, although he was unmarried and eligible beyond dispute? Leaning his elbows on the rail at the other side of Miss Denis, he resolved to make a third—welcome or otherwise—and said,—

“You are talking of the natives, sir? They are certainly most mysterious aborigines, for they do not resemble the Hindoos on one side, nor the Malays on the other. They are more like stunted niggers—you never see a man above five feet, some not more than four.”

“Niggers, yes,” replied the General; “there is some idea that they are descendants of the cargo of a slaver that was wrecked among these islands; other people think, that they hail from New Guinea.”

“They have very odd customs, have they not?” asked Helen.

“Yes,” replied the General; “their mode of sepulture, for instance, is peculiar. When a

man dies, they simply put his body up a tree."

("Whence the slang term 'up a tree,' I suppose," muttered Mr. Quentin *sotto voce*.)

"And when the fowls of the air have picked his bones, they remove the remains, and present his skull to the widow, who wears it round her neck, slung to a string."

"But will freely part with it at any time," added Dr. Malone, who had now joined the group, "ay, even in the early days of her affliction, in consideration of a bottle of rum."

"And pray what about the *men*?" inquired Helen, jealous for her sex.

"Oh, their tastes are comparatively simple," responded the doctor; "they are all a prey to a devouring passion for—you will never guess what—*tall hats*! I believe some firm in Calcutta drives a brisk trade with this place and the Nicobars, bartering old tiles for cocoanuts. When a chief dies, he can have no nobler monument in the eyes of his survivors, than a pile of tall hats impaled

above his grave. They are almost the only article they care about, and I suppose they have an idea, that it endows them with dignity and height, besides the hat, a few rags, and a necklace of human finger-bones, and their costume is complete."

"They have another weakness," put in the General—"dogs. We get rid of all the barrack curs in that way."

"What! to *eat*?" almost screamed Miss Denis.

"No, no, they are very much prized—merely to look at. I wish to goodness we could export that brute of Mrs. Creery's!"

"She would far sooner be exported herself!" said Dr. Malone. "What was his last feat, sir?"

"I wish I could believe that it *was* his last," returned the General angrily. "The other day, when Mrs. Creery was dining up at my place, she unfortunately shut him up in the drawing-room, and for sheer spite at missing the meal, he tore up a valuable fur

rug, gutted the seats of two chairs, and ate the best part of the last army list! Yes, you may laugh, Miss Denis, and it certainly sounds very funny—but you don't know, Nip."

"No, but *I* do," cried Dr. Malone. "He lies down and feigns death if he sees a larger dog coming in the distance, and will murder any unfortunate pup of half his size; some dogs have a sense of chivalry, generosity, gratitude, but he is a *brute*!"

"Yes," chimed in Mr. Quentin, "if things are not going to his liking, he adjourns to Creery's dressing-room, and devours a couple of pairs of boots; that is to say, tears and gnaws them to pieces, just to mark his sense of injury. If they only disagreed with him!—but they don't, and Creery can't even have the poor satisfaction of licking him; for whenever Nip, sees him arming himself with a stick, he at once fastens on his leg, believing the first blow to be half the battle!"

"A portrait from life!" exclaimed Dr.

Malone. "I wish I might be allowed a shot at him at 100 yards!"

"I wish you might; and if you do get the chance, I'll wink at it," returned the General; "he is an insufferable nuisance—a savage, mean, mischievous, lazy, cowardly—"

"Now, now, General," cried Nip's mistress, coming across the grass in a swimming walk, her arms dangling loosely at her sides, "What is all this wonderful laughing about? and who are you abusing—man, woman, or child? It's seldom that you say a word against any one! Come, who is it? Shall I guess who is mischievous, lazy, and *mean*? Now really you might let *me* into the secret, when it's known to Miss Denis. Can it be any one in Ross? Dear me!"—with sudden animation,—“I have it!—it's—”

Of course she was just about to exclaim "Mr. Lisle," when the General hastily interrupted her, saying, "We were not talking scandal; it was merely a little joke of ours"—looking appealingly at Dr. Malone and Helen, who were choking

with suppressed laughter—indeed the very railings behind the former were shaking dangerously,—“it was only a miserable jest, Mrs. Creery,” reiterated the General, nervously (seeing that her mind was bent on dragging the secret from his bosom), “that was all, really, you know. And, by the way,” lowering his voice, and speaking confidentially, “I wanted to consult you about something—about getting up a little dinner for Miss Denis.”

To be consulted, and by the General, was much to Mrs. Creery's mind! so she immediately walked aside with him, prepared to give her whole attention to the discussion. It now was nearly eight o'clock, and people were leaving. Helen was escorted to her own door by Dr. Malone, and Mr. Quentin, Colonel Denis once more bringing up the rear, but this time he had a companion—Miss Caggett. Mr. Quentin lingered below the steps of the verandah, and squeezed Helen's fingers as he took a very reluctant leave of her. He half hoped that he would have been

earnestly requested to honour them with his company at dinner, but this hope was doomed to disappointment, he was dismissed by Colonel Denis with a careless nod ! Later on, as Helen sat alone in the verandah, and looked out over the sea, recalling the scenes of this most wonderful, eventful day, and dwelling on all the new faces she had seen, and the strange things she had heard, it is an extraordinary, but veracious fact, that—with the perversity common to her sex—she cast more than one thought to a man she had been twice warned against in the same afternoon, in short, Mr. Quentin's pauper friend, Gilbert Lisle.

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Meanwhile Mr. Quentin had been rowed over to Aberdeen, had climbed the hill in capital spirits, and with a healthy appetite ; and had found his companion already at home, reposing in an arm-chair in front of the Bungalow, smoking. He fully expected to be severely cross-examined about his visit, and on the subject of Miss Denis, and was pre-

pared to enter into the fullest details, and to paint the lady in the richest tints, but, alas! a disappointment awaited him. Lisle never once referred to Ross—much less to the young lady. He had had a big take of fish, and had caught three bottle-nosed sharks off the Red Buoy—bait, hooks, and nets, engrossed his mind entirely.

Mr. Quentin was seriously affronted. Was ever such callousness known? could such indifference be matched? Indifference that would not even take the trouble to ask such a simple question as “What is she like?”

CHAPTER VI.

QUEEN OF THE CANNIBAL ISLANDS.

“An eye like mine,
A lidless watcher of the public weal.”

Tennyson.

PERHAPS it would be as well, before going further with this story, to dedicate a page or two to a description of that very important lady, Mrs. Creery. The gentleman who occupied a position in the background as “Mrs. Creery’s husband,” was a hard-working, hard-headed Scotchman, who thoroughly understood domestic politics, and the art of holding his peace. He had come to Port Blair soon after the settlement was opened up, and had subsequently gone home, and returned with a bride, a lady not, strictly speaking, in her first youth—this was twenty years ago. But let no one suppose that

Mrs. Creery had spent the whole of that interval on Ross. She had made several trips to England, and had passed like a meteor through the circles in which her sister, Lady Grubb, was as the sun. Oh, how utterly weary were Mrs. Creery's intimates of those brilliant reminiscences—heard for the thousandth time. Did they not, one and all, detest the very name of “Grubb”?

How was it, people asked each other, that Mrs. Creery had reigned so long, and so tyrannically at Ross? How came she to occupy a position, from which nothing could dislodge her—there had been mutinies, there had been social risings, but they all had been quelled. Even a lady who had positively refused to go in to dinner, unless she was taken in before Mrs. Creery, had been quenched! Circumstances had placed the latter on the social throne, and not election by ballot, much less the potent power of personal popularity. The General was a widower, the chaplain a bachelor, the next senior officer unmarried also, the wife of

another was an invalid, and spent nearly all her time in the south of France (according to Mrs. Creery, for south of France, read lunatic asylum). She herself, was a woman of robust constitution, and always ready to say "present," consequently, the position of leading lady in the settlement fell to her happy lot! She "received" at the General's parties and dances, she occupied a chief place at feasts, a front pew in church, and had a whole programme to herself on band nights. After all, there was not much in this, one would imagine; but Mrs. Creery thought otherwise. The General, an urbane, and popular elderly gentleman, was governor over the Andamans, in the Queen's name; he was her Majesty's representative, and held the lives of fifteen thousand convicts in the hollow of his hand; his dominions stretched from the Cocos to Havelock, and included even the distant Nicobars. As his social coadjutor, Mrs. Andrew Creery considered that she shared all his other dignities, and had gradually come to look upon herself

as a species of crowned head, ruling not merely the settlement, the Europeans, and the convicts, but even the far-away savages of the interior! These royal ideas had developed but gradually—a little germ (sown by the first strains of “God save the Queen,” played as she accompanied the General to a presentation of prizes) had thrown out roots and suckers, and planted a sense of her own dignity in her bosom, that nothing but death could eradicate!

Mrs. Creery had no children, and ample leisure, and with such a magnificent idea of her social status, no one will be surprised to hear, that she condescended to manage the domestic concerns of all within her realms! She had come to look upon this as a sacred duty, and viewed all comings, and goings, with microscopic scrutiny. The position of her house favoured this self-imposed supervision: it was close to the pier, had a good back view of the bazaar, and the principal road ran by her door, and consequently it is no exaggeration to say, that *nothing* escaped

her. From long practice she could tell at a glance where people were going, as they ran the gauntlet of her verandah ; if the General wore a " regulation " helmet, he was probably *en route* to an execution at Viper (an island five miles away) ; if his Terai, he was bound for the new buildings on Aberdeen, or to make semi-official calls ; if his old topee, he was merely going out shelling. Ross was a small island, very thickly populated. Mrs. Creery could easily make the circuit of it in twenty minutes, and did so, at least thrice in the twenty-four hours.

She had no home ties, no domestic tastes ; she did not care for flowers, nor work ; never opened a book, and looked upon shelling as childish nonsense. Her one taste was for poultry, her one passion, her dog " Nip," and when she had fed her hens, collected their eggs, given out daily stores, scolded her domestics, she had nothing to occupy her for the remainder of the day. After early breakfast, she generally donned her well-known topee, and sallied forth on a tour of

inspection; to quote Captain Rodney, who could not endure her, she "turned out" each family at least once daily, and never omitted "visiting rounds." She had by this time pretty well exhausted Ross—and the patience of its inhabitants—she knew every one's affairs, and what they paid their servants (and what their servants said of them in the bazaar), and what stores they got in, just as well as they did themselves.

Mr. Lisle had undoubtedly baffled her, (though she had not done with him yet,) however, Helen Denis was a novelty, and opened up an entirely new sphere of interest; therefore, ere nine o'clock on the day after the tennis party, Mrs. Creery's umbrella was once again heard imperiously rapping on the steps of Colonel Denis's verandah.

"You don't breakfast till twelve, I know," she called out, "for I met your cook and asked him, and it's only just nine"—this to Helen, who had come to the drawing-room door. "It's only just nine, and we shall have a nice long morning to ourselves,

and be able to look at your things comfortably. Are you unpacking now?"

Helen very reluctantly acknowledged that she was—had just got all her boxes open.

"Then I shall come, and help you," said her visitor, laying down her umbrella, and speaking as if she were conferring a great favour. "You go first, and I'll follow."

She was quite as good as her word. There she sat, with her hands on her knees, her topee pushed well back (so as not to interfere with her vision), in closest proximity to Helen's largest trunk, and saw every article separately taken out, and unfolded. Nothing escaped her; all she saw, she priced; and all she fancied, she tried on (or tried to try on), and meanwhile she kept up a running fire of comments somewhat in this style:—

"So *that's* your black silk; and trimmed with lace, I declare! most unsuitable for a girl like you, quite ridiculous! I shall speak to your father, and if he likes, I don't mind taking it off his hands. I dare say there is

some letting out, and I'm rather in want of a dress for my receptions."

"Yes," gasped Helen, who was kneeling on the floor, "but I do not wish to part with my black silk."

"What use is it? *You* can't wear it," irritably. "Every one would laugh at you, if you came up to one of the 'at homes' in a gown like that, and saw *me* in a simple muslin; it's not suitable to your position—do you understand that?"

"I did not mean to wear it at tennis," stammered Helen—who was a little cowed by Mrs. Creery's eye; "but Miss Twigg said that it would be useful."

"Not a bit of it! What does she know about what would be useful?" retorted the lady rudely.

Miss Denis made no reply, but was firmly resolved that nothing short of physical force should part her and her very best dress. Mrs. Creery said no more either, but determined to have a word with the Colonel by-and-by, and also to give him *her* opinion of

the absurd extravagance of his daughter's outfit!

As she sat drawn up beside Helen's trunks, whilst she unpacked, her perpetual queries, "What is this? What did you give for that?" were, to say the least of it, trying. However, her victim was but recently emancipated from school, had a wholesome awe of her elders, and a remarkably sweet temper, so the whole inspection passed off quite smoothly,—and entirely to Mrs. Creery's satisfaction.

"I saw you talking to Lizzie Caggett last evening," she remarked, as she arranged her topee at the mirror, and dodged her profile in a hand-glass. "What was she saying to you?"

"She was asking me, what I thought of the place?"

"Well, don't tell her much—that's *my* advice to you! She is certain to come here borrowing your patterns, but don't lend her *one*! I shall be really angry with you, if you do" (this came well from a lady who

was carrying off the promise of half a dozen). And little did Helen know the large reading a Dirzee gives to the term "taking a pattern." It means, that he rips up seams, punches holes in the material with his gigantic scissors, and turns a new garment inside out, and upside down, with as little ceremony as if it were an old thing that was going to the rag-bag. At present, ignorance was bliss. Mrs. Creery's convict Dirzee was coming down that very afternoon, to carry away Helen's two prettiest, and freshest, costumes!

"Now," continued the elder lady, "mind what I say about Lizzie Caggett; she has dozens of dresses, and is head over ears in debt in Calcutta, not to speak of the bazaar here—I know myself, that she owes Abdul Hamed two hundred rupees,—and do not encourage her in her wicked extravagance."

Then walking to the window, she cried out rapturously, "What a view!! Why, I had no idea of this; you can see every *bit* of the

road—and there's the General going up home, and Mr. Latimer with him! I suppose he has asked him to breakfast—that's the second time this week! And here comes Dr. Malone, *running*; he has something to tell him! Oh, I must go! Where's my umbrella? Don't forget the dresses," and without further adieux, Mrs. Creery was flying down the steps, brandishing her arms, and calling out in a shrill falsetto,—

"Stop, stop, Dr. Malone. I'm coming. Wait for *me*!"

CHAPTER VII.

MR. QUENTIN'S PIANO.

"I have assailed her with music, but she vouchsafes no notice."

Cymbeline.

MAIL-DAY had come round once more, and Helen could hardly believe that she had been already six weeks on Ross, it seemed more like six days. She had made the acquaintance of almost everybody, had visited the mainland, and Chatham and Viper; had ridden on a settlement elephant, had been to two picnics, and dozens of tennis parties, and was beginning to realize that she really was the mistress of that pretty bungalow under the palm-trees on the hillside.

She was now great friends with Mrs. Home, and solemnly engaged to Billy; she saw Miss Caggett daily, and Mrs. Creery

almost hourly, and other people called with complimentary frequency; notably Mr. Quentin, who found many excuses for tarrying in Miss Denis's drawing-room, and, remarkable to relate, Miss Caggett invariably contrived to drop in on the same occasions. She was usually in the highest spirits, and laughed, and smiled, and chatted as agreeably as if she had not come on purpose to mount guard over a recreant admirer, and by her presence endeavour to modify his attentions to her rival! Mr. Quentin found her company a bore; how could he settle down to read poetry, or to talk vague sentimental follies, whilst Miss Lizzie's sharp, shadeless eyes were following every look and movement? Moreover, she seasoned her conversation with disagreeable remarks, uncomfortable questions, and unpleasant insinuations.—Miss Denis was musical, but at present she had no piano; her father had promised her a new one from Calcutta after Christmas, but in the meantime she must wait. Mr. Quentin was surprised to find that he did not make as rapid strides in

Helen's good graces, as he usually did under similar circumstances, but he accounted for this amazing fact quite readily in his own mind, and was not one whit daunted. In the first place, she had but little sentiment in her composition ; she was a sort of girl who, if you invited her "to come out and look at the moon" in your company, would be certain to burst out laughing in your face—and yet it seemed to him that her own face would make an admirable subject for a very charming romance—she was so absurdly matter-of-fact, so ready in turning off tender speeches, and so provokingly inclined to ridicule his most warranted compliments. *Of course* she liked him—the reverse never once dawned upon his arrogant brain—but why was she so hard to get on with? Doubtless, Lizzie Caggett's haunting presence, handicapped him heavily ; but Rome was not built in a day, and he had a grand idea—nothing less than sending Miss Denis over his piano as a loan—with a view to vocal duets. His attentions to the young lady had

been very "marked" in Mrs. Creery's opinion; he was her shadow at all the 'at homes,' no other man had a chance of speaking to her; but *this* "attention," which Mrs. Creery beheld coming up the pier, and borne by twenty staggering coolies, threw all his previous advances entirely into the shade.

The good lady hurried on ahead, and burst into Helen's drawing-room, breathless (the umbrella-rapping stage was a ceremony of the past), saying,—

"What do you think? There is a piano coming up the pier in charge of Mr. Quentin's butler—twenty coolies carrying it, at eight annas each! Mr. Quentin is sending it over to you—and, of course, it's *all* settled? and," aggrievedly, "I really think you might have told *me*," and here she was obliged to pause for breath.

Helen stared at Mrs. Creery; never had she seen her so excited, was she going out of her mind, and about a piano?

"A piano, Mrs. Creery?—what piano?"

“A large square.”

“And you say that Mr. Quentin is sending it, but it is certainly not coming *here*.”

“But it *is*. I saw a note addressed to you in the butler's hand.”

“Well, it shall go back at once; it is some mistake. I don't know what papa would say!”

“Your father!” scornfully, “as if *he* would meddle, and as if your wishes are not his law; besides, he knows it would be an excellent match!”

“Mrs. Creery,” interrupted Helen, becoming scarlet, “please don't say such things; it's no question of—of—what you hint, but of this piano. What does it mean?”

“It's the thin end of the wedge, *that's* what it means?”

“It shall go back!”

“Well, here it comes now at any rate,” said the elder lady triumphantly, as the chanting, thin-legged bearers came staggering along under the heavy piece of furniture, with its wadded red cover; and a big, bearded

butler presented a note with a profound salaam.

“Wait!” cried Helen, making an imperative gesture, tearing the envelope open. “Don’t bring it up yet!”

“What’s all this?” inquired her father, appearing upon the scene at this juncture.

“A piano for your daughter from Mr. Quentin,” volunteered Mrs. Creery with infinite gusto.

“Here, papa,” handing him the note, “what am I to say?”

“You will have to keep it for the present, I suppose,” he answered rather reluctantly, as he glanced over the missive; “you will have one of your own soon.”

Mr. Quentin’s note ran as follows:—

“DEAR MISS DENIS,—Please do not be alarmed at the size of the accompanying package, nor angry with me for my temerity in sending it; the piano is going to pieces over here, with no one to play on or look after it, and the hot winds on Aberdeen, are ruination to an

instrument. You will be conferring a great favour on me, if you will give it room, and honour me by making use of it, until the arrival of your own. I will crave permission to bring over *a few* songs, and we might have a little practice occasionally. If possible, I shall come across this afternoon.

“Yours very sincerely,

“JAMES QUENTIN.”

Of course, when the matter was put in the light of a favour to be conferred, there was nothing for it, but to allow the instrument to be brought in, and lodged in the drawing-room.

Helen received the open note somewhat mechanically from her father, and will it be believed, that Mrs. Creery actually held out her hand for the missive—just as if it were quite a matter of course, that she should peruse it also?

Peruse it she did, and so slowly, that one would imagine that she was committing it to memory; then she folded it up and returned

it to Helen, saying rather tartly, "So you *are* going to keep it, after all?"

"Yes! I suppose so."

"It's only an excuse of course! You will have him here singing, day and night, mark my words! However, I must allow, that he has a sweet tenor, and I shall often drop in for an hour," with which dire threat, Mrs. Creery took her departure, and hastened away to spread the last piece of news, viz. "that it was all *quite* settled betwen Helen Denis and Mr. Quentin; he had sent her over his piano, and written such a sweet note!"

To Miss Caggett this intelligence was a painful shock, she never believed half of what Mrs. Creery said, but the arrival of the piano had been witnessed. What wrath and anguish filled her mind, as she thought of swains she had snubbed, and chances she had thrown away, for that agreeable shadow, that fickle, faithless, heartless, handsome Jim Quentin! But Lizzie was not easily suppressed; in some respects she was as dauntless as the Bruce!

She put on her best hat, and went up and listened to some solos and duets, that very same afternoon; and Mr. Quentin, whose patience was almost threadbare, remarked to her very significantly,—

“I like duets, Miss Caggett, as well as any one, but I don’t much care for trios; they are never so harmonious. I’m sure you agree with me!”

Lizzie turned pale. She understood, though Helen did not—indeed, *she* was exceedingly glad of Miss Caggett’s society on these occasions; it took the too personal edge off her visitor’s remarks, and acted as a wet blanket to his compliments. She (Helen) was not quite sure whether he was in jest or earnest at times, but she sincerely *hoped* that it was the former. Strange as it may appear, she was utterly indifferent to the almost invincible Jim Quentin. Why, she could not have told. She knew that he was handsome, agreeable, and showed a flattering penchant for her society. More than this, he had informed her,

hundreds of times (indirectly), that he admired her beyond words! And yet, and yet—

Miss Caggett was firmly resolved to punish her recreant lover, and to humble him in the eyes of his new Dulcinea; so she smiled, and showed all her teeth, and put her head on one side, and tried to look playful, and said,—

“Mr. Quentin, you are a *naughty* man! What will Mr. Baines say when he hears you have sent his new Collard and Collard travelling about the settlement?”

Mr. Baines was the gentleman for whom Mr. Quentin was acting.

“*He* say?” colouring. “What is it to him?”

“Only his property,” laughing rather boisterously.

Helen felt extremely uncomfortable. There was an undercurrent of hostility in Miss Caggett’s laugh, that now struck her for the first time.

Mr. Quentin was not easily cowed, and never had any hesitation about telling what

Mark Twain calls a "stretcher!" and answered quite promptly,—

"I bought it from Baines; he was hard up. So you are not as wise as you imagined, Miss Caggett."

Miss Caggett did not believe a word of this. Men who come to "act" for six months, and have the use of a furnished house as a matter of course, are not likely to purchase the piano—especially when they can't *play*! But what was the use of speaking out her mind? For once she was prudent, and held her peace; however, she cast a glance at Mr. Quentin, that said volumes, and presently she got up, and went away; and when she had departed, Mr. Quentin exclaimed,—

"How I wish that odious young woman—or middle-aged woman—would not favour us with so much of her society; her presence has a most irritating effect on my nerves!"

"I thought you and she were great friends," said Helen calmly. "I am sure she told me that at one time, you were with them

every day, and dined, and boated, and sang duets with her."

"I suppose I was three times in their house—I don't know what she will say next! However," anxious to turn to another subject, "do not let us waste our time, or rather *my* precious time over here, on such an insignificant subject. Will you try over the accompaniment of the Wanderer?"

Mr. Quentin found himself so much out of practice that he went across to Ross for an hour's vocal exercise, about four times a week. Latterly Mr. Lisle had listened with a gleam of mockery in his eye, as his companion made excuses for these frequent visits, and one day Mr. Quentin up and spake boldly,—

"You are right to laugh at my talk about books and music and new songs, when I say that they are the errands that take me over so often—of course, it's the girl herself!"

"Oh, of course," sarcastically.

"I tell you what it is, Lisle—I'm really serious this time; and the queer part of it is,

that it's her cool airs and sharp little speeches that have carried the citadel."

"What citadel?" raising his eyes, and searching the other's face.

"My heart, to be sure!"

"Pooh! your heart! Why, that has been taken as often as there are days in the year."

"Merely a temporary occupation, my dear sir, but this time it's a complete surrender. 'Pon my word, if she had any money, I'd marry her to-morrow!"

In answer to this remark, Mr. Lisle blew a cloud of smoke into the air, and calmly ejaculated the word,—

"Bosh!"

"I never knew such a fellow as you are!" cried Apollo indignantly. "You have no appreciation of sentiment; you are as tough and matter-of-fact as an old boot! All you care for are rough field sports, such as a long day's shooting, hunting, or fishing, and then to come home to your dinner, and sleep like a dog."

“I only wish I *could* sleep like a dog!” rejoined the other, with a laugh. “What with the gun and bugles, and those confounded peacocks, there is no such thing as getting a wink of sleep after four o’clock.”

“Now,” continued Mr. Quentin querulously, “I hate your style of life. You don’t care what clothes you wear, you tramp the bush and over hill and dale with a gun on your shoulder, on the off chance of a wild pig, or a paltry brace of snipe! Or you grill by the hour in a boat, fishing for sharks and sword-fish. Now give me instead—”

“Yes, I know exactly what I’m to give you instead; the refining charms of ladies’ society, vocal duets and afternoon tea. Far, far pleasanter, is it not, to sit in a cool, shady verandah, whispering soft nothings to a pretty girl—I believe you said she *was* pretty—than to be out in a boat blistering in the sun, or tramping the woods gun on shoulder, with a good average chance of being winged oneself by an Andamanese arrow! But let me tell you, James Quentin, that your amuse-

ment is in reality the most dangerous of the two, and, if Dr. Parks is to be believed, you have already burnt your fingers badly."

"Hang Dr. Parks! I don't want to hear about him, or any one else, except Helen Denis."

"Helen Denis! And does she not wish to hear about any one but James Quentin?"

Mr. Quentin smiled a seraphic smile that inferred much; his companion was not surprised. Quentin was exactly the sort of fellow to please a young lady's fancy, naturally he would seem to her, the very beau ideal of a hero, with his low voice, heavenly blue eyes, and handsome face; but then she was not aware that he did not stand the test of close intimacy. *She* had never heard him cursing his chokra or his creditors—she never saw him in ragged moral dishabille!

"Of course she does not know that this is by no means your first tender effort at gallantry?—However, that is of no moment,

Miss Caggett will undeceive her," tranquilly remarked his companion.

"What a beastly ironical fellow you are, Lisle! First you rake up old Parks, and then Lizzie Caggett. I wish she were in a sack at the bottom of Ross Harbour!" blustered Mr. Quentin.

"Because she represents a kind of conscience in her own person? Take care that Miss Denis does not do the same some day."

"No fear," stoutly. "She is now a mere child in many ways, full of delight with everything about her, and with no more idea of flirting than—" pausing.

"I have," suggested his listener, innocently.

"I would be sorry to name her in the same breath with you; and that reminds me, that more than once she has asked me questions about Mr. Lisle!"

"Oh, of course, they all do *that*!"

"She has heard of you."

"From my good, kind friend, Mrs. Creery,

I'll bet a fiver, and I'll bet another, that she has painted me as black as an Andamanese,—and the devil himself would not be blacker.”

“Well, come over with me to-morrow, and let Miss D. see, that you are not as bad as you are painted.”

“What would be the use? If she is all you *say*, I might fall in love with her also! and that would be a very uncomfortable state of affairs.”

Mr. Quentin looked at him for a second with a cool stare, and then burst out laughing.

“Well, upon my word! you are the queerest fellow I ever met, and that's saying a good deal; you can never be in earnest for five minutes. Now look here, I want to talk to you seriously about my money affairs.—You see my governor is an old man, and when he is laid in the family vault, I'll have a decent little competence, but until *then* I cannot keep myself, much less a wife! I'm certain he won't give me a halfpenny more allowance than I have already. I've an uncontrollable knack of spending coin, and running into

debt ; but with the family acres, I think I might manage to rub along pretty well."

"So you might," agreed his listener.

"But then the governor may live till he is a hundred?"

"So he may," again admitted the other gentleman.

"For goodness' sake, Lisle, don't sit there with your eyes half shut, driving me mad with your 'so you might' and 'so he may.' Make a suggestion."

"My dear sir, I cannot think of any to offer. If you were an Earth Indian, you would be all right ; you know they tie up their aged as bait for wild beasts. Being a mere Englishman—"

Mr. Lisle never finished what he was about to say ; for his companion sprang to his feet, towered above him, glared at him for a second, opened his mouth and endeavoured to speak,—but failed ; and then flung out of the apartment in a terrible passion.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I WAS HIS DEAREST LIZZIE!"

"Alas! for pleasure on the sea,
And sorrow on the shore."

Hood.

MRS. HOME's entertainments to her friends, generally took the form of a picnic or gipsy tea, partly, we suspect, because these outings were in great favour with Tom and Billy, and partly because she had a knack of making these "camp affairs," as Mrs. Creery contemptuously dubbed them, go off, to everyone's satisfaction. She had now issued invitations for a tea at North Bay, where her guests were to ramble about, and stroll on the beach, or botanize in the jungle; and two large boats left the pier carrying the company, which comprised the host, hostess, and family, Col. and Miss Denis, Miss Caggett, Mr. Latimer, Dr. Parks,

Dr. Malone, the Grahams from Chatham, and the Greens from Viper. Mr. Quentin did not patronize these rustic *réunions*, and he was rather annoyed to find, that the Denises were bent on going, and leant over the pier as they were rowed away, looking unutterable reproaches at Helen—looks not lost on Miss Caggett, who was sitting beside her. It was an oppressive afternoon, even at four o'clock the sky was molten and the sea like oil, and Mr. Quentin shouted after the pleasure party,—

“I would not be a bit surprised if you people were in for a storm coming back—better not stay late.”

“Storm! what nonsense! Why, the water is like glass!” exclaimed Mrs. Home. “He merely says that, because he is not coming himself—though I asked him, and told him he might bring Mr. Lisle, for I really do not see, why he should be debarred from everything.”

“If he is debarred, it's his own fault,” rejoined Lizzie Caggett, accepting the challenge

in the absence of Mrs. Creery in the other boat. "If he would only be open about himself, no one would mind his poverty."

Mrs. Home looked sweetly incredulous, and Miss Caggett continued,—

"At any rate the chances are that he would not come if he was asked. I don't suppose he has any decent clothes, and he is more in his element in the bush, or out in that white boat of Mr. Quentin's, sailing among the islands; he half lives on the water, but," with a peculiar laugh, "there is no fear of his being drowned!"

Miss Lizzie was merciless to this mysterious pauper, chiefly because she had an idea, that he had talked his host out of certain matrimonial designs, that were very near to her heart. Jim Quentin's visits had been less frequent, ever since he had given lodging to this odious adventurer!

Now Mrs. Home considered Mr. Lisle inoffensive and gentlemanly-looking, and quite entitled to keep his affairs to himself if he chose, and she took up the cudgels at once, and

the argument was waxing hot, when, luckily, some one commenced to sing, and politeness enforced silence. It was a long row to North Bay, fully eight miles, and it was past five o'clock, when the party landed, and began to walk about and stretch their rather cramped legs, and to stroll along the beach with a careless eye to shells.—But this was not a *bonâ fide* shelling trip.—Presently, in answer to a whistle, with various degrees of alacrity they flocked round Mrs. Home's well-spread tablecloth, which was laid out on the moss under a big Pedouk tree, and in a position, that commanded a fine view of the open sea; here every one ate and drank, and were merry; and afterwards they sang songs and gave riddles and exchanged stories, well-known or otherwise, and then by degrees they scattered once more, and went up into the woods close by, in couples or in small parties, and commenced (the ladies especially) to tear down orchids, that would be priceless in grey-skyed England; to fill their hands and their baskets, with enormous bunches of Eucharis lilies that

carpeted the jungle. Helen was somewhat surprised to find herself alone with Lizzie Caggett, but this was a mere passing thought, her whole attention was given to the flowers; she felt quite bewildered among such an *embarras de richesse*, and she paused every now and then to exclaim, and to gather handfuls. She was also in ecstasies at the love birds, honey-suckers, blue-jays and golden orioles that flew "with a shocking tameness" across their path.

Miss Caggett was accustomed to these sights; her enthusiasm—if she had any—she kept bottled up for the benefit of a male companion, and did not trouble herself to respond to Helen's raptures; she had dogged her, and purposely kept off Dr. Malone, and singled her out as her own special associate, in order that she, as she said to herself, "might have it out with her here in the jungle," where she could be as shrill as she pleased,—yea, as one of the island peacocks! where she could give reins to her wrath, and no one but her unsuspecting rival

would be any the wiser!—Now on Ross the very walls had ears.

The two girls wandered along, one empty-handed, and the other laden with spoils, till they came to an opening in the forest, where there was a very beautiful shallow pool, apparently a spring. It was an unusual sight, and Lizzie halted, and looked down into it, and beheld the reflection of own her figure, and of her, at present, very cross, discontented, little face, as seen in a mirror set in a lovely frame of ferns, and mossy stones, and graceful grasses.

As she pondered over her own appearance, and felt an agonizing thrill at the patent fact that she was now beginning to look *old*! a bright young face came into view over her shoulder—a bright young face that she hated from the bottom of her heart! No wonder she was a prey to envy, as she gazed at Helen's reflection, never had she looked better, than in that soft white gown, with a wreath of Eucharis lilies twined round her sailor hat! Lizzie stared, and noted every

item of that pretty vision, and felt a conviction of her own powerlessness to crush the horrible truth, that one of those two faces was lovely, and smiling, and young, and that the other was pinched, ill-tempered, and *passée*—and that other her own! Her day was on the wane, the summer of her life—oh, that it would come again! she would sell her soul to recall it!—was gone. And in Helen Denis's case, she had all her golden youth before her. These bitter thoughts were too much for her self-control, her face worked convulsively, the corners of her mouth went down, and all of a sudden she burst into tears! Helen was dismayed, she led her gently to a fallen log of ebony, and implored of her to tell her if she was ill, or what was the matter?

The tears were but a summer shower, and quickly spent, and Miss Caggett came to herself, dried her eyes, and said, "That it was merely a slight nervous seizure, the result of a racking headache, and meant nothing. But," she added, "I'm tired, and we may as well rest here a while, there is no hurry."

“Very well,” agreed Helen, “I want to settle these flowers, they are in a most dreadful state,” proceeding to arrange her much crowded basket.

“Then, whilst you arrange your flowers, dear, I will tell you a story,” said Lizzie, now completely composed.

“Oh! do, how nice of you! I like stories, and this”—looking round—“is the very place for one. A ghost story.”

“But mine is going to be a love tale,” said Miss Caggett briefly.

“I don’t care for them so much,” rejoined Helen, sorting out orchids as she spoke. “However, anything *you* like!”

“Once upon a time there was a girl, and she lived in the East Indies with her mother, her name was Lizzie Caggett;” she commenced. Helen, who was kneeling at the log, using it as a table for her flowers, looked up, as if she did not believe her ears. “Her name, as I tell you, was Lizzie Caggett, she was not a great beauty like *some* people,—but she was not bad looking. A young man came to

Port Blair, paid her marked attention, fell in love with her, and she with him, he gave her songs and presents, he wrote her heaps of letters, he told her that he could not *live* without her; his name was James Quentin!" She paused, and Helen got up slowly from her knees, and stood in front of her—her heart was beating rather fast, and her colour was considerably brighter than usual. "A girl arrived at Port Blair, named Helen Denis, and he, man-like, paid her attention at first, because she was *new*,—he half lives at her house, he is always at her side, and" (viciously) "he has made her the talk of the whole place, he!"—also rising and suddenly, dropping the narrative form, for plainer speaking,—"*is a hypocrite*, he told you a *lie* about that piano! it belongs to Mr. Barnes, he has pretended to you that he scarcely knew *me*. Scarcely ever was out of our house, is nearer the truth! One thing he can't deny, and that is his own hand-writing, look here," dragging out a thick packet of letters, tied with blue ribbon, "you can read them if you like." "You

won't!" in answer to a scornful gesture. "Then there," tossing them violently on the ground, where they fell with a heavy thud, and the ribbon coming undone, lay scattered about like a pack of cards.

Miss Caggett after this outbreak paused, and folded her arms akimbo, but her eyes were gleaming, and her lips working convulsively.

Helen was thunderstruck, never had it dawned upon her till now, that she had come and seen, and conquered, this furious lady's lover; the sudden announcement, gave her a shock and for some seconds she was speechless.

"There," proceeded Miss Caggett, pointing to a letter at her feet, "three months ago I was his dearest Lizzie, and now you are his dearest Helen," and she laughed like a hyena.

"You are altogether mistaken, and quite wrong!" cried her companion, speaking at last; "I am nothing to him but an ordinary acquaintance, and I don't think you should

repeat these terrible things about him to me. You can't care very *much* for him, or you would not say that he is a hypocrite, and does not speak the truth! As to his making me the talk of the place, I am quite distressed to hear that Port Blair is so hard up for a topic!" Helen was very angry, and her face was an open book, in which every emotion that swayed her, was eloquently expressed. Mr. Quentin was utterly indifferent to her, (and this fact gave her a considerable advantage, over Miss Caggett;) besides being angry, she was disgusted, and looked down upon her opponent, with a glance of unmistakable scorn.

"Of course you will *tell* him all I have said!" exclaimed Lizzie, with an hysterical smile.

"Oh! of course,"—ironically.

Miss Caggett was filled with a horrible fear, that she had overshot her mark, (which had been merely to blacken Mr. Quentin to Helen, to arouse her ire, and take advantage of the ensuing quarrel, and

coolness, and once more ingratiate herself with her late adorer.) But who would have expected Miss Denis to be supremely ironical, and scornful; and to have taken the news in this very strange way;—for Lizzie believed that no girl living could be indifferent to James Quentin.—Instead of tearing her hair, and weeping, and denouncing him, she was quite unmoved. She had even spurned his letters! hateful, cold-blooded thing!

“Shall you tell him all I have said about him?” she reiterated defiantly.

“Your suggestion is of course prompted by what you would do *yourself* under similar circumstances,” returned her companion in a cutting tone.

“Do you pretend that you don’t *like* him?” demanded Miss Caggett. “That you never told me, you thought him handsome; do you pretend that you are not in love with him, and have lured him away from *me*?”

“I pretend nothing; I do not even pretend to be his friend before his face, and then abuse him unmercifully behind his back!

And," now pointing with the tip of her shoe, "there are your letters! I advise you not to leave them here, for the amusement of some picnic party! And I *request* that you will never speak to me in such a way again, nor mention the name of your friend Mr. Quentin."

So saying, Helen picked up her basket, turned her back on Lizzie, and walked off into the jungle in a rather stately fashion; never once looking back at the little figure on the log; (if she had done so, she would have seen that little figure, shaking a tiny menacing fist in her direction; but ignorance was bliss, and she rambled on mechanically, her mind not a little disturbed by the recent "scene.") Lizzie Caggett was *not* a nice girl—not a lady—and as to Mr. Quentin, she had never quite trusted his dreamy blue eyes. Now she came to ponder over the subject, his stories were often a bad fit, one tale did not exactly match another, he forgot what he had said previously, and although he had angrily disowned Miss Caggett, yet she

had noticed one Mezzo Soprano song among his music, on which was scribbled in pencil, "Lizzie, with J.'s love." Deeply occupied in unravelling various new ideas, the young lady strayed further and further into the wood, occasionally stopping to cull some too tempting flower or fern—and pondering as she plucked. She was extremely reluctant to go back to the company, and to face Miss Caggett, after their late conversation, but a sudden cessation of birds' notes, a duskiness, and a little chill wind, warned her that it was really time to retrace her steps. She had come further than she imagined, and it was fully half an hour ere she had extricated herself from among the trees, and once more gained the open space looking down upon the shore. But what was this? To her astonishment the beach was deserted. There was no sign of living creature to be seen (save the dying embers of the gipsy fire) and, did her eyes deceive her, or did she really behold, two heavily laden boats steadily rowing back to Ross? (indeed one was already

a mere speck on the water), and she had been left behind!! At first she could not realize her position; she, the chief guest—in whose honour the party had been given—she forgotten, and abandoned, to pass the night on that terrible desolate mainland alone! She ran to a rock, jutting out far into the water, and waved her parasol, and screamed, and called, but the boats were far beyond ear-shot, and the awnings were up.

She stood looking after them like a modern Dido, with strange, fixed, despairing eyes, then turned and gazed behind her at the thick, black, and now forbidding-looking forest, that loomed all round her, and encompassed the shore. She sat down on the rock, locked her arms round her knees, and watched the two heartless boats till they were quite out of sight. This operation lasted for some time, and when there was nothing further to be seen in the direction of Ross, she turned her face towards the open sea, and beheld, to her horror, a large canoe coming rapidly in her direction! It was

still at some distance, but she knew that the build of the boat was not European, nor did Europeans go out boating in *tall hats*. She did not wait for a closer inspection; she fled—fled for dear life—right up into the much dreaded forest, and dashed among the underwood like a mad creature; in a certain thick covert she threw herself down, and there she lay panting like a hunted hare. From her hiding-place, she could see the savages; they paddled close into shore, attracted by the smoke of the fire that had boiled Mrs. Home's mild domestic kettle! They came in a big, red war-canoe, and were about fifty in number; one or two remained in the canoe, the rest sprang over the side, and waded to land—followed by a whole legion of dogs. They swarmed round the fire, and found but little to repay their visit, beyond a box of matches, which was evidently a great prize! There were several monster fish caught by Mrs. Creery's boatmen,—and left behind as worthless—these they tore to pieces, and devoured raw. A tin

of Swiss milk, and half a loaf of bread were also discovered and shared. Whilst they sat round the embers in a circle, and greedily discussed these rarities and the fish, Helen, with every nerve in her body throbbing, and her heart nearly bounding out of her bosom, was presented by her own vivid memory with that scene in Robinson Crusoe, where he sees the savages sitting round a fire, and feasting on their human victims! Supposing they were to discover her, and kill her, and eat her? At this moment she nearly shrieked aloud, for a large, red dog, a kind of pariah, (who, unknown to her, had been sniffing among the underwood,) now suddenly thrust up his head close to hers, and gazed at her in amazement for some seconds; luckily for Helen, instead of breaking at once into a loud "bay," and triumphantly announcing his "find,"—he was evidently one of the barrack curs whom the General had colonized; he had seen a European before,—and probably understood English!! At first, when she whispered in a faltering voice, "Oh, Toby

Toby, like a dear, good dog, go away, and don't betray me," he took no notice, but merely stood staring with his round, yellow eyes. However, when emboldened by desperation, she said, "Hoosh! be off!" and made a movement as though to pick up a stone—he fled!

But what if a less educated animal were to discover her? if he did, she was lost.—She lay in her hiding-place scarcely daring to breathe, the very sound of her own heart seemed appalling; indeed, it stood quite still for some seconds, when—the fish being despatched—the aborigines stood up and sauntered back to their canoe, and several of them pointing at the jungle, seemingly suggested a ramble in that direction! But these enterprising spirits had no weight, and Helen, although fainting with terror, noticed that a fat old man, in a huge cocked hat (evidently a person of much authority), waved his hands with decision towards the horizon; and making gestures at the big bank of clouds that were gathering there, peremptorily collected all

his party, who immediately swarmed out into the canoe, followed by their pack of dogs, and paddled away as swiftly and as suddenly as they had come—and Helen breathed a deep sigh of relief, when she was once more left upon the mainland, entirely alone!

CHAPTER IX.

A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS.

“The storm is up, and all is on the hazard.”

Julius Cæsar.

MR. LISLE had been out boating far beyond North Bay; but a sombre sultry afternoon, and the ominous silence that precedes a tropical storm, had warned him to steer homewards. He had heard of the awful tornadoes that occasionally churned these seas into white mountains, that dashed wrecks around the islands; that the storm god in torrid regions was a terrible sight when aroused, and that a sunny, sleepy afternoon had been known to develop into a howling hurricane in less than an hour. Moreover, that tragic tales of boats blown out to sea, or capsized with all hands, were but too well known at Port Blair.

The sky was now so inky black that it could scarcely look blacker, low muttering thunder was heard from behind the clouds, and an occasional red flash shot along the horizon. The breeze was rising steadily, and a quick cool ripple was on the water. On the whole, Mr. Lisle said to himself that there was every prospect of a very dirty night, and the sooner that he was under the lee of Ross the better. Passing a kind of cove in North Bay, he happened to notice a long white object in the now gathering dusk : it seemed to be near the shore, and was probably a blighted tree. Luckily, he looked again, and observed that it moved. Could it be a human figure, at that hour ?—quite impossible ! But, although moments were precious, he resolved to give the thing, whatever it was, a chance ; and to take a nearer view and to accomplish this, he was obliged to steer in closer to the land, which he did—to his boatmen's unconcealed uneasiness. Vainly did they scowl, and point expressively to the storm that was coming up so rapidly ; he assured them that this delay

would be but momentary; a few vigorous strokes, and they were sufficiently near to make out, that the seemingly blighted tree, was the figure of a European woman, in a white dress! In two or three seconds they had touched the beach, and Mr. Lisle sprang out of the boat, waded through the water, and another instant brought him to the side of a trembling, distracted girl, whom he had never seen before, but who nevertheless accorded him a half-frenzied, though silent welcome!

Helen, after she had seen the last of the war canoe, had once more ventured down to the shore. The dark thick tropical jungle, seemed to stifle her, and, for all she knew, might be swarming with wild beasts! The solitude was something appalling, and the silence!—(save for queer outlandish sounds in the forest every now and then, which caused her to tremble violently.) Her position may not seem so very terrible to some people,—who will say, “She knew she was sure to be fetched in the morning;” but a night alone

upon that savage coast, was enough to make even a stout-hearted man feel nervous, much less a girl like Helen, and by this time, she was completely unhinged. As she sat staring into the gloom, she suddenly made out a boat, positively a European boat, with three people in it,—and for the first time her hopes rose. She waved her arms frantically, and she ran up and down the beach like a demented creature. She was seen, and they were coming. Oh, the relief of that moment! For the first time during these dreadful hours, tears rolled down her cheeks.

The boat came in as close as it could, and a man jumped out of it, and approached her rapidly. Stranger as he was, she rushed to him, seized his arm, and tried vainly to speak, but her whole frame was shaken with convulsive sobs.

“What is it? What does it mean?” he asked, as she clung to him, like a drowning person.

“It’s a—pleasure party,” she stammered out. “I was gathering flowers, and was left behind. Oh, take me with you! Take me home!”

“Come on, then,”—an Englishman’s usual formula; “I’ll take you back to Ross. But we must look sharp,” speaking rather brusquely. What if this tearful, frightened young lady were to go into hysterics, or to faint in his arms? that would be a nice business!

Without a single word, but with obedient alacrity, she followed him to the edge of the sea,—and something told her, that she was walking in the wake of the notorious *Mr. Lisle*.

“I’d better carry you through the surf,” he said, turning at the water’s edge; and coolly putting his arm around her, he was just about to lift her on the spot, but, with flaming cheeks, she thrust him aside, saying, “Thanks, no; I’ll manage it myself.”

“Oh, all right,” he returned, indifferently, “but I think you are foolish! What’s the good of two people getting wet, when *one* will do?” now wading out to the boat through surf, which took the young lady up to her knees. He got in first, helped her in afterwards, and, making a sign to the impatient boatmen to

raise the sail, he said to his dripping companion, "There is going to be a bit of a blow" (a mild way of putting it), "but we shall have it with us, we shall be home in no time," he added, in a tone of assumed cheerfulness.

In a few seconds they were gliding along over the water, before a nice stiff breeze, and Helen found time to collect her senses, and to relate her adventures—at first in rather a broken, husky voice, but latterly with more composure.

And lest the reader should all this time be angrily blaming Colonel Denis, and Mrs. Home, I here beg to state that each believed Helen to be in the other's boat—a thought for which they were indebted to Miss Caggett.

The rising wind and threatening sky, made prudent Mrs. Home collect her party, and start; being under the impression that Helen would return with her father. When the people belonging to number two boat were mustered, and inquiries were made for Miss Denis, Miss Caggett assured them that

she had long since departed with Mrs. Home, and had been quite animated in declaring that "there was no mistake about the matter, as she and Miss Denis had been walking in the woods together." She also displayed quite a feverish eagerness to be off!—for reasons which we can easily understand. (Miss Lizzie had picked up her letters and pocketed them, and sauntered down to the beach, and there had joined the company, and come to the conclusion that a night's solitary reflection among the tall Gurgeon and Pedouk trees would do her rival a world of good! "How easy," she said to herself, "to say afterwards, that I must have made a mistake—every one is liable to make mistakes!") Thus reassured, the picnic party took their places in the second boat, and no search or calling acquainted Helen of their departure; and consequently, she was left behind, thanks to Miss Lizzie Caggett.

The small white gig which had picked off the young lady, now flew before the wind, and Helen's new acquaintance sat with the

tiller-ropes in his hands, and his gaze bent apprehensively on the south.

"I suppose I may as well introduce myself," he said presently. "My name is Lisle. Perhaps you have heard of me?" he added expressively—at least to his listener, his words seemed to have an ironical, significant, tone!

Helen muttered a faint affirmative.

"And you, I think, must be Miss Denis?"

"Yes."

"And were you really afraid of the savages?"

"I never was so much frightened in all my life, I thought I should have *died*."

"I see a good deal of them, knocking about the islands. They are not such bad fellows, and I doubt their cannibalism."

"I should be sorry to trust them," returned Helen, shuddering.

"You are cold, I see, and wet, of course, but that was your own fault. Here," suddenly removing it, "you must take my coat," throwing it over her knees, where it remained

all the time, in spite of her anxious disclaiming. After this there was a long gap in the conversation.

Mr. Lisle undoubtedly possessed what the French call, "a talent for silence." "How grave he looked!" thought Helen. How fast they were going! How frightfully down on one side! The wind was getting louder and louder, till it reached a kind of hoarse scream: the dusk had suddenly given place to Egyptian gloom, and Helen felt sure (as she sat with her hands tightly locked in her lap, and her heart beating very quickly) that they were having more than a mere "blow" as they tore through the water! All at once, the first splash of a cold, salt wave dashed over the boat, and drenched her so unexpectedly, that she could not refrain from a stifled exclamation; but this was the only time that she lost her self-control. She sat motionless as an image, and neither moved nor spake, not even when a shrieking gust carried her hat away, and whirled it into the outer darkness; and the

storm loosened her long hair, and flung it to the wind to play with. How they flew up the water mountains, and were hurled down like a stone into the corresponding valleys ! If they were to be drowned, she hoped that it might be soon ; this present suspense was torture. All was so black—an awful opaque blackness—the roar of the tempest the only sound ; it came in furious gusts, then died away, whilst wave after wave, swept over the boat ; and now the low rumble of thunder burst suddenly into one frightful peal, that seemed to shake the very sea itself : a blinding flash lit up the gloom ; for a moment it was as daylight. Helen involuntarily turned her eyes towards her companion, and met his point blank. In that second, their two souls seemed to recognize one another ; in his glance, she read intrepidity, coolness, and encouragement. She at least was with a brave man, and might die in worse company ! He, on his side, noted the rigid figure of his passenger, her locked hands, and firmly set lips ; she was no longer the timid, shrinking creature he had dragged

on board the gig less than an hour previously; she was a heroine, capable of looking death in the face, and Death's grim visage was never closer to her than *now*. Another, would have been shrieking and clinging to him; but this girl was nerved to meet her fate alone, and he honestly respected her fortitude. It was certainly just touch and go, if they ever weathered Ross Point, but the boat was a stout one, and the sails were new. The twinkling lights on the island now came in view, how scornfully they seemed to mock these four people, who were struggling for life and death in the surrounding howling darkness!

Another awful plunge into the hollows, and a hissing of boiling waves, and a feeling as of water closing all round them. It seemed to Helen as if *this* was the end—they had shipped a heavy sea, the boat reeled, staggered, and made another effort—she was not going to founder just yet.

The stricken boatmen shouted hoarsely to

one another, and baled in the dark, Helen crept unconsciously closer to the steersman, and during a lull in the blast, she said,—

“You can swim, Mr. Lisle, of course, and if *you* escape, will you take a message from me to,”—with a sob—“poor papa.”

“No I won’t,” he answered roughly.

“But I shall be drowned, I know,” and she caught her breath at the chilling thought.

“If you are, I shall be drowned *too*, you may be sure of that. If I am saved, you may rely upon it, that you will be saved also. We will sink or swim together.—If she *does* capsize, don’t lose your head, and don’t cling to me, whatever you do ; trust me, and I’ll take care of you ; but I hope it’s not going to come to that,” he added ; then, after a long silence and another blinding sea, he exclaimed, “Thank God, we are over the worst, and under the lee of Ross !”

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It was still quite bad enough, but they were no longer exposed to the full fury of

the hurricane; in another ten minutes they were being violently washed up and down against the soaking pier, in the presence of a crowd of anxious faces, who were peering over, amidst the glare of torches and general excitement. The first person to greet them was Colonel Denis,—looking like a man of seventy, and scarcely able to articulate.

“Oh, Helen,” he cried, as he seized his tottering, dripping daughter, “this has nearly killed me! Only an hour ago we missed you, and you were sighted from the look-out just before dark, and I never believed that any boat could live in that,” pointing his hand at the black hissing sea. As Helen and her father stood thus together on the steps—she trying to realize that she was safe, and he, most thankfully doing the same—the white boat showed signs of shoving off.

“You are not going over to Aberdeen now,” shouted Colonel Denis, descending, and making a futile grab at the gunwale. “Are you a madman?”

“It’s not so bad inside, between the islands,” roared the other in reply. “Good night.”

“Papa, stop him! Mr. Lisle,” shrieked Helen, “come back—come back, Mr. Lisle.” The idea of any one putting out again, among those tumbling waves, seemed to her nothing less than suicidal; but the white boat was already gone,—lost almost instantaneously in the surrounding darkness.

“It’s not so risky between this and Aberdeen, Miss Denis,” said Dr. Malone, “and Lisle is a capital sailor. But what a grand fright you have given us all, and what a terrible trip you must have had!”

Miss Denis made no reply, she staggered up to the top of the steps, and stood upon the pier, in the light of half a dozen torches; a strange figure, in a dripping dress, with her long hair covering her as a kind of mantle,—and hanging far below her waist, in thick dark masses.

“Take her home, and put her to bed at once,” said Dr. Malone, “and give her a

warm drink, and don't let any one worry her with questions," (doubtless he was thinking of Mrs. Creery), "to-morrow morning I will call, and she will be all right, and will tell us how it happened that she let us go off without her."

But how that came to pass, was never clearly explained up to the present day—people had their suspicions—but suspicions go for very little.

Miss Denis carried out Dr. Malone's instructions to the letter.—She went home, and went to bed, and fell sound asleep. One thing she did, which he had not prescribed,—

She dreamt of Mr. Lisle!

CHAPTER X.

MR. LISLE FORGETS HIS DINNER.

“A little fire is quickly trodden out,
Which, being suffered, rivers cannot quench.”

Henry VI.

MISS DENIS was none the worse for her adventure the next morning, and was called upon to give a full, true and particular account of herself to Mrs. Creery and Mrs. Home, also Mrs. Graham and Mrs. Green (who had prudently stayed all night on Ross). No one could imagine how the mistake had occurred, and all these ladies talked volubly together on the subject, and it afforded the island a nine days' wonder—though that was not saying much! Mrs. Creery was certainly most thankful that Helen (she now called her by her Christian name) had been brought back in safety, but she was by no means as

well pleased at the means to which they owed her restoration.

“Of course, my dear Helen, you need not notice him,” she said, apropos of Mr. Lisle; “just let your father thank him, or send a message by Mr. Quentin. That will be ample!”

Mr. Lisle having made Aberdeen with some difficulty, had toiled up hill, closely followed by the shivering boatmen, in quest of glasses of rum. He was cold, and stiff, and exhausted; both mind and body had been strung to their utmost tension for the last three hours, and he sank into a Bombay chair in the verandah, and threw off his soaking hat, with a sense of thankfulness and relief. There he remained for a long time in his wet clothes, staring out on the black, ragged-looking clouds, through which a very watery moon was vainly trying to assert herself. Mr. Quentin was dining elsewhere, and Mr. Lisle kept dinner waiting, till it was his good pleasure to partake of that meal. (Eastern cooks are accustomed to a meal being put back or

forward an hour or so according to their masters' whims ; these sudden orders never ruffle their composure, whilst in England such proceedings would cause domestic revolutions.) For more than an hour, Mr. Lisle lay back in the comfortable chair which he had first occupied, as a mere momentary resting-place ; evidently he had something out of the common to occupy his thoughts. How long was it since he had spoken to a lady ? (Apparently Mrs. Creery went for nought.) His mind reviewed but cursorily his morning's sport, dwelt a short time on the various incidents of that terrible sail, and rested finally for a considerable period on the contemplation of his lady passenger ; he could see her before his mental vision quite distinctly *now*, as she stood on the pier steps, with her soaking, clinging dress, her streaming hair, and colourless face, on which the torches threw a blinding light ; see her stretching out her hands, and calling after him in a tone of agonized appeal,—

“ Mr. Lisle, come back ! Come back, Mr. Lisle ! ” It was a curious fact,—he said to himself, with a rather cynical grin—that this was positively the very first invitation he had ever received to Ross ; and the circumstance seemed to amuse him not a little.

After a while, he began to think that he was rather a fool, sitting there mooning in his wet clothes, and he rose and stretched himself, and went into the house, and having changed his garments, sat down to his solitary meal. He and Jim Quentin met at breakfast as usual ; the latter was generally too much engrossed with his own proceedings, to take any vivid interest in his companion’s pursuits—to do as little work as possible, to get as much novel-reading, cigarette-smoking, and physical and mental ease, was the bent of his mind, and his thoughts were solely centred in himself, and his own arrangements.

He never troubled his head about Lisle’s “ manias ; ” fishing, and boating, and shooting were all bores to him, involving far too

much bodily exertion, and discomfort. He took all his partner's adventures for granted, and never expected that these were of a more thrilling description, than the capture of a big shark, or the slaughter of a wild hog.

"What a gale that was last night!" he said, as he languidly helped himself to devilled kidneys. "By George! the picnic party must have found it pretty lively coming back. It blew a hurricane! But I suppose they were in before that?"

"They were," assented Mr. Lisle—and whatever else he was going to add, was interrupted by the appearance of one of the boatmen in his blue cotton suit, salaaming profoundly at the foot of the verandah steps. He had something in his hand. What? it was the miserable wreck of a lady's smart, cream-coloured parasol! A jaunty article, that had tempted Helen's fancy in a London shop-window, and was now a mere limp rag, cockled and shrunken with sea-water—having been thrown into the bottom of the boat, and there forgotten.

“Halloa!” exclaimed Mr. Quentin.
“What is that?”

“Miss Denis’s parasol, which was left in the gig. I brought her back from North Bay last night,” replied his companion with as much composure, as if it were a part of his daily programme.

The other made no immediate reply, but turning half round in his chair, surveyed him steadily for some seconds.

“*You* brought her back?” he repeated incredulously. “And why, in the name of all that’s extraordinary?”

“For the very excellent reason that she wished to be my passenger,” returned Mr. Lisle, coolly.

“I hate riddles”—irritably. “What the deuce do you mean?”

“I mean that Miss Denis was left behind by her party owing to some very queer mistake, that I happened to be sailing by, like Canute the king, and that she hailed the boat, and we took her off.”

“Quite romantic, upon my word”—with a rather forced laugh. “Well,” after a pause,

“now that you have seen her, what do you think of her?”

“How can I tell you? It was as dark as pitch, I only had a glimpse of her now and then by lightning.”

“Yes; and that glimpse?”

“Showed me that she had heaps of hair. She did not scream or make a fuss, but kept quiet, for which I was really grateful.”

“And did you have any talk?”

“Talk! My good sir, are you aware that we were out in that hurricane between seven and eight o'clock last night, and that it was by God's mercy, we escaped with our lives?”

“I daresay you would like to improve the acquaintance now you have seen her—Eh? Come, tell the truth!”

Mr. Lisle made no reply, this question had hit the goal; he certainly *did* feel a curious and unusual interest in this girl. All the same, he made up his mind that this novel sensation would wear off within the next twenty-four hours, and whether or no, he did not mean to yield to it.

Mr. Quentin crossed to Ross alone, somewhat to his own surprise; and Helen, as she listened to his condolences, felt rather an odd little twinge of disappointment, for she had half expected that for once, he would have been accompanied by his mysterious companion! To-day her smiles were not as responsive, nor her laughter as ready as usual.—Her keen-witted visitor did not fail to notice this,—also a curious abstraction in her manner. She was partly thinking of Mr. Lisle (with an interest that surprised herself), and partly recalling to her mental eye, that little pink figure seated on the log, with a face convulsed with passion, and dozens of love-letters scattered round her on the moss!

About a week later Colonel Denis met Mr. Lisle in the Bazaar, and insisted on his accompanying him home, and being there and then presented to his daughter.

“She wants to thank you herself; only for you, she believes that she would have lost her wits; only for you, she would have had to pass a whole night on that coast alone.”

Vainly did his captive mutter "that it was nothing, that he was only too glad to have had the opportunity," &c. Colonel Denis was not to be denied, and he led him off, *nolens volens*, to make formal acquaintance with the island beauty at last.

Miss Denis was sitting on the steps of the bungalow, feeding a tame peacock, but as she saw her father approaching with a visitor in tow, she stood up, rather shyly, to receive them. She looked quite different to-day (naturally). Her dress was soft, cream-white muslin, a heavy Indian silver belt encircled her slender waist, her hair was bound round her head in thick plaits, her countenance was serene—and marvellously pretty. It struck Mr. Lisle's artist eye, that she and her pet peacock would make a very effective picture, with that glimpse of blue sea, and palms, as their background.

Of course she had a conviction that this spare, sunburnt man, following her father, was the redoubtable *bête noir*, who, although she had been two months in the settlement,

she had never yet met with face to face, save in the gloom, on that eventful evening!

After a little talk about the storm, and the picnic, they adjourned indoors, and sat in the shady drawing-room, whilst Sawmy brought in afternoon tea.

"How do you like this part of the world, Miss Denis?" asked her visitor. "No doubt you are tired of the question by this time?"

"I like it extremely, so much that I believe I could live here all my life."

Mr. Lisle smiled incredulously, and slightly raised his brows.

"Yes," in reply to his expression. "Where could you find a more lovely spot, a kind of earthly Paradise?"

"And a land where it is always afternoon," quoted her companion, "but you will probably get tired of it in six months, and be glad enough to stretch your wings."

"No, indeed"—indignantly—"why should I? I have everything I want here, and

every wish fulfilled?" She paused, became exceedingly red, as if she were afraid she had been too gushing to this stranger.

"I am filled with amazement, and respect, Miss Denis, you are the only person I have ever come across, who admitted that they were now, in the actual present, absolutely contented, and had no unsatisfied cravings, but perhaps yours is a contented mind?"

"No, I have not been contented elsewhere, but here it is different,—here I have my home, and papa—"

She hesitated, and her listener mentally added,—

("And Jim Quentin!")

"And I think perpetually fine weather, and beautiful surroundings, and liberty, go a long way towards making one feel as I do. Every morning when I wake, I have an impression that something delightful is going to happen during the day."

"Jim's visit, of course," thought her companion. "A sure sign that she is in love," but he merely said aloud,—

“It’s well you mentioned liberty, for I fancy that scenery and sunshine go a short way with those beggars”—pointing to a group of brown convicts, who were now wending silently down the road. “Do you not find everything very different out here, to what it is at home?”

“Yes; but I had no home, I was always at school. Papa and I have so few belongings,—but I am quite forgetting all this time, that I have not offered you a cup of tea.”

Mr. Lisle watched her as she busied herself among the spoons and saucers, and thought what a nice child she was, and what a shame it would be, to let Jim Quentin break her heart!

“You see a good deal of Quentin,” he remarked rather suddenly; but her colour did not rise as she handed him his tea, nor did the cup rattle in the saucer at the mention of that potent name. She met Mr. Lisle’s keen interrogative glance, with the utmost composure; how different he seemed without

his hat, and how strange it was, that it had never occurred to any one to mention that Mr. Lisle was handsome ! The circumstance came home to her quite unexpectedly, as she now noticed his well-shaped head and profile ; true his skin was tanned brown by the sun, his hair was touched with grey upon the temples,—but in her heart, she there and then discovered, that he had a far more striking face than irresistible “ Apollo,” Quentin !

“ I am taking this to papa,” she said, rising, “ he sits in the verandah, you see.”

“ Yes, I see ”—receiving the cup from her hand and carrying it out to his host who was absorbed in a blue document. (Mr. Quentin had trained him to efface himself in this fashion, for to be quite frank, he could not stand that gentleman’s society, much less his songs and sentimental speeches.)

“ I suppose,” said Mr. Lisle, as he passed the piano,—Helen’s own property,—“ that that is Quentin’s last new ditty,” indicating a

piece on the music stand. "I know it's just in his line, 'Told in the Twilight.'

"Yes."

"I'm sure it gives him great pleasure coming over here, and listening to your music?"

"I believe he derives some enjoyment from his own singing also," she replied, demurely,—remembering the hours that she had toiled over his accompaniments. "Are you musical?"

"In theory only, not in practice. I am very fond of listening to a string band, or to good instrumental performers, but as far as I'm concerned myself, I cannot play on a comb, much less a Jew's-harp!"

"I see"—glancing at some books—"that you read, Miss Denis. May I ask where you get your literature?"

"Some from the library at Calcutta,—some from Mr. Quentin." This latter announcement was a shock.

"Ah!—I daresay his contributions are more entertaining than instructive! So you read French novels?"

“Oh, no!”—becoming scarlet—“I have never read any except a few French stories. Miss Twigg picked out. Mr. Quentin merely lends me books of poetry and magazines, more solid reading I get elsewhere.”

“Why do you read solid books?”

“Chiefly to discover my own deplorable ignorance, I live and unlearn,”—and she laughed.

“Really”—also smiling—“as how?”

“Well, for instance, until last week I was under the impression that America had been discovered by Christopher Columbus, in the year 1492.”

“I fancy that most people are still labouring under the same delusion.”

“But it is quite wrong”—shrugging her shoulders—“it was found by Buddhist priests in the fourth century, at least so says a book that I have just finished, and there does not seem to be the smallest doubt upon the question in the author’s mind.”

“Miss Denis,” said her listener, gravely, “your reading is too deep for me, and I shall

be quite afraid of you. The next time I see you, you will be telling me that it is all a mistake about the battle of Waterloo, that there was no such person as Queen Elizabeth, and that Ireland was first discovered by the Japanese."

Helen laughed immoderately, and then said,—

"Why Ireland of all places?"

"I don't know, unless because it is generally the unexpected that happens with regard to that country."

"Have you ever been there?"

"Yes, frequently; I've an uncle in the Emerald Isle, who has carried on an ink feud for years with my father,—but is gracious enough to me."

"And I've an aunt there, who is the very reverse, for she never answers papa's letters!"

"Then supposing we make an exchange of relatives?" suggested Mr. Lisle.

Colonel Denis was quite astonished to hear so much animated conversation and laughter

in his neighbourhood, and could not see why he should not have a share in whatever was going on; but shortly after he made his appearance Mr. Lisle took his leave; and Helen was really amazed, when she saw by the little clock, that his visit had lasted almost an hour!

“A very gentlemanly, agreeable man, no matter *who* he is,” said her father, after he had sped the parting guest; “Eh, Nell?”

“Yes, papa.”

“And I don’t believe with Mrs. Creery, that he is one of our fellow-countrymen, who are obliged to roam the world over,—owing to their invincible ignorance of the number of kings, which go to a pack of cards,” added Colonel Denis as he picked up a newspaper, and subsided into an arm-chair.

Mr. Lisle imparted the history of his visit to his host that same evening after dinner.

“And what do you think of her now you have seen her in daylight?” asked Mr. Jim, who seemed anxious to have his friend’s verdict.

“ Oh, that she is a pretty girl, of course unspoiled as yet, and charmed with her surroundings, and immensely delighted at finding herself grown up, and mistress of that bungalow,—which is her doll’s house so far.”

“ And do you think she likes *me* ? ”

“ Yes ; of course I did not put the delicate question point blank as your deputy, but I daresay she does ; for her own sake I hope she won’t get any further than liking ! ”

“ You are frankness itself, my dear fellow, and *why* ? ”

“ Because she is much too good for you, and you know it ! You have been in love about fifty times already, and for pure lack of something to do, are thinking of offering the shell of your heart to this pretty penniless child. She would accept it,—if she cared for you,—*au grand sérieux*, and give hers in return, for always ; but you, once your little *entr’acte* was played out here,—say in three months,—would sail away, leave her, and

forget her ! You have done it to dozens according to your own confession ;—why not again ? ”

The expression of tolerant amusement on his hearer's face, rapidly gave way to indignation, and he said, with much asperity,—

“ This is vastly fine ! You are uncommonly eloquent on behalf of Miss Helen's maiden affections ; you beat old Parks in a common walk ! One would imagine that I was some giant Blunderbore who was going to eat her ! Or that—” and he paused, and blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

“ Or what ? ” asked the other quietly.

“ That you meant to enter the lists yourself, since you *will* have it.”

Mr. Lisle picked a crumb off the cloth, and made no reply, and his companion proceeded,—

“ But of course you know as well as I do myself, that such an idea for *you*, would be all the same as if you went and hanged yourself out of the big tree in Chatham ! ”

To this Mr. Lisle said nothing, but smoked on for a long time in dead silence. At last he got up, threw his napkin over the back of his chair, and said, gravely,—

“If you are really in earnest for once, and hope to win the girl, and marry her,—well and good. I believe you will have all the luck on your side; if on the other hand, you merely intend to seize such a rich opportunity for amusing yourself, and playing your old game—”

“What then?” demanded Jim with a lazy challenge in his eye.

“You will see what then?” rejoined the other, standing up and looking at him fixedly, with his hands grasping the back of his chair. He remained in this attitude for fully a minute, and neither of them spoke; then he turned abruptly, walked out into the back verandah, and down the steps, and away in the direction of the sea-shore.

Mr. Quentin took his cigar out of his mouth, leant his head on one side, and lis-

tened intently to his fast receding footsteps. When their final echo had died away, he resumed his cherooot, with a careless shrug of his shoulders.

“Did Lisle mean to threaten him?”

It certainly looked uncommonly like it.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FINGER OF FATE !

“ Gigantic shapes and shadows gleam,
Portentous through the night.”

Longfellow.

FROM this time forward, Mr. Lisle occasionally accompanied his companion to Ross, and listened to the band, and was even to be met with at tennis parties, in brave defiance of Mrs. Creery's frowns, and Miss Caggett's snubs. Helen noticed that he was tabooed, and lost no opportunity of speaking to him or smiling on him—but such opportunities were rare. Mr. Quentin had a way, acquired by long practice,—of elbowing away all intruders from the vicinity of those whom he delighted to honour; and effectually introduced his own large person between Helen and any other swains, that might seek her

society;—in short, he monopolized her completely. Mr. Lisle had entirely abandoned photography, shooting, and sailing, for the very poor exchange of the rôle of a dispassionate spectator. Why did he come to Ross to see what he did not like? his friend's handsome face bent over the beautiful Miss Denis, eliciting her smiles and merry laughter. Naturally, like most lookers-on, he saw a good deal—the envious outer circle of young men, and Miss Caggett, who had long ago made a truce with Helen, but who loved her as little as of yore, and was about as fond of her as any lady could be, who beheld her rival appropriating her own special property! Still, she figuratively folded her enemy to her bosom, and smothered her feelings wonderfully,—but Mr. Lisle fathomed them. Perhaps he had a fellow-feeling for her, who knows? It appeared to him, that the citadel of Miss Denis's heart was carried at last; and who could wonder, that an inexperienced school-girl would long hold out against the artillery of Mr. Quentin's attractions;

attractions that had proved irresistible to so many of her sex! No, he noticed that she coloured, and looked conscious whenever he appeared, and was not that a sure symptom that the outer fosse was taken! Little did he imagine, that the unfortunate young lady felt exactly as if she were helplessly entangled in the web of a huge spider, that she would have given worlds, to rid herself from this ever-hovering, ever overshadowing presence,—that so effectually kept any one she wished to speak to aloof and out of reach. Her natural good nature, and politeness, prevented her from actually dismissing him, and she had not the wit, or the experience to get rid of him otherwise.—She had indeed ventured on one or two timid hints, but with regard to anything touching another person's wishes, Mr. Jim had no very keen perceptions; and with respect to his own company being anything but ever welcome, he would not have believed Miss Denis, even if she had told him so in the plainest terms! Why should *she* be different to the rest of her

sex; they all liked him! So Mr. Quentin kept his station by her side, by his own wish, and by public concurrence. He immediately joined her whenever she appeared, carried her bat, her shawl, or her band programme, held her tea-cup, walked home with her, and visited her three or four times a week. It was too tiresome, that he should be her invariable companion, and vainly had she endeavoured to break her chains, but he was older, and more experienced, than she was,—and thoroughly understood the art of making *her* conspicuous, and himself immovable! Little did Mr. Lisle guess, that Miss Denis would have much preferred him as a companion. Alas! the world is full of contrariness.

Mr. Quentin appreciated Helen, because she was difficult to fascinate, Helen appreciated Mr. Lisle, because he held himself aloof, and never gave any one the chance of acquiring that familiarity, which notably breeds contempt! and Mr. Lisle was greatly surprised to find, that he was exceedingly envious of his friend, that he admired Helen

Denis more than any girl he had ever seen ! But he admired, and stood afar off ; no thought of disloyalty to James Quentin. No *arrière pensée* of that motto, "All's fair in love and war," ever entered his mind, he was only sorry, as he said to himself, that he was too late !

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The Settlement band played twice a week in the little public gardens on Ross, and their strains were an irresistible summons to all the (free) inhabitants. One special afternoon, we notice Mrs. Home holding animated converse with Mr. Latimer, in his cool, black alpaca coat ; we see Mrs. Creery enthroned on a sofa (which she always provided) alone, clad in a gorgeous combination of colours, that could only have been achieved by a daring soul ! We observe Helen and Miss Caggett in company—the latter had apologized for her outbreak. "It would not *do*," she said to herself, "to be on bad terms with the Denis girl, she was too popular, all the men would be on her side, Captain Rodney,

Mr. Green, and that ugly Irishman, Dr. Malone; wretches who were always praising her rival in her hearing! A day or two after the storm, she had gone to Helen, and begged and implored her to forget a certain scene between them in the forest above North Bay; declared that she would be miserable for life if Helen was not her friend, that she would rather have her little finger, than Mr. Quentin's whole person, that she would sooner marry the typical crossing-sweeper than him, and that she had been very cross and bad-tempered, and hoped that Helen would forget an occasion that it would make her blush to recall! This was very fine, but *who* had ever seen Miss Caggett blush? However, Helen was quite ready to accept the olive-branch, and, like the school-boys, to say "Pax."

There was a considerable gathering at the band, including "Mr. Quentin and Co.," as Mrs. Creery humorously called them. On band nights, the former usually reclined on the sward, literally and figuratively at Helen's

feet, but to-night this butterfly was occupied (in quite a temporary manner) with a nice-looking widow, who had come over from Rangoon to pay a visit to her sister, Mrs. King, at Viper. People were walking about in couples, standing in groups, and sitting down in rows. Mrs. Creery (who did not appreciate the solitude of greatness) nodded to Helen to approach, and take a place beside her, saying, rather patronizingly, as she accepted the invitation, "So I hear that your little bachelor's dinner went off quite nicely, and that everything was eatable except the ice pudding!"

Helen felt annoyed, "quite nicely" was indeed but faint praise, after all the trouble she had taken, and the success that she flattered herself she had achieved.

She made no reply, but became rather red.

"And you had Mr. Quentin, of course, and the General, and Mr. Latimer, and Dr. Parks. What champagne did you give them; from the mess, or the bazaar?"

"Bazaar champagne! Oh, Mrs. Creery"

—indignantly—“there is no such thing, is there?”

“Yes, and why not? I believe no one can tell the difference between it, and that expensive stuff at the mess. I declare—” her attention suddenly distracted to another quarter—“look at Mr. Lisle, in a respectable suit of clothes”—glancing over to where that gentleman was talking to three men.

“Billy!” she screamed to one of Mrs. Home’s little boys, “go over to Mr. Lisle, and tell him that I want him at once.” “Fancy”—turning to Helen and speaking in a tone of pious horror—“those men are European convicts, tickets of leave, and allowed to use the garden and library—a very unwise indulgence. I quite set *my* face against it, and so I’ve told the General. Of course no decent person would speak to the wretches; no one but a man like Lisle!”

“What have they been sent here for?” asked her companion.

“One for forgery, one for stabbing a man, in a sailor’s row in Calcutta, and one

was, *he* says, sent here by mistake ; but most of them say *that* ! Well," raising her voice, " Mr. Lisle permit me to congratulate you on your choice of companions."

" Poor creatures ! They never have the chance of exchanging a word with any one but each other, it pleases them, and does *me* no harm. Lots of worse fellows are at large, —and prospering ! "

" Oh, pray don't excuse yourself, Mr. Lisle. Birds of a feather—you know the adage."

" Yes, thank you, Mrs. Creery," making an inclination of such exaggerated deference, that Helen now understood what Miss Caggett meant, when she said that he was polite to rudeness. " You sent for me, Mrs. Creery ?"—interrogatively.

" Yes, because I did not choose to see you talking to those jail birds ! You can talk to *me* instead."

Here was alluring invitation !

" Of course you know Miss Denis—but only recently. You were late in welcoming her to Port Blair ! "

“I have the pleasure of knowing Miss Denis, but as to welcoming her to Port Blair, such a proceeding would be altogether presumptuous on my part, and no doubt she received a welcome, from the proper quarter.” And he once more bowed himself before Mrs. Creery.

Helen could scarcely keep her countenance when she met his eyes, and hastily turned off her smiles by saying,—

“I am sorry you could not dine with us last night.”

“Mr. Lisle *never* dines out,” replied the elder lady, speaking precisely as if she was Mr. Lisle’s interpreter.

“Quentin is talking of getting up a dinner,” he said, “in fact he is rather full of it.”

“Dinner! Well, don’t let him give it till full moon. I hate crossing in the dark, and be sure it is on a mutton-day!” said the elder lady authoritatively. (N.B. Mutton was only procurable once a week.)

“I will remember your suggestions, but a good deal depends on the butler, and *his* inclination. He is rather an imperious

person, we have but little voice in the domestic arrangements."

"*You!*"—scornfully—"of course not; but I should hope that Mr. Quentin is master of his own house."

"He leaves all to Abraham, and generally everything has turned out well,—except perhaps the writing of the *ménu*! Last time, people were a little startled on glancing over it, to see that they were going to partake of 'Roast lion and jam pupps.'"

Helen laughed delightedly, but the elder lady gravely said, "Oh, roast loin and jam puffs. Well, that's the worst of not having a lady in the house. Such mistakes never happen in *my* establishment!"

"Would you like to take a turn now, Miss Denis?" said Mr. Lisle, glancing at her as he spoke.

"I daresay she would, and so would I," returned Mrs. Creery briskly, rising and walking at the other side of him, an honour for which he was by no means prepared.

"What is that unearthly noise?" inquired

Helen ; “ *what* are those sounds that nearly drown the band ? ”

“ Yes ; reminds me of a pig being killed,” rejoined Mr. Lisle ; “ but it is merely the Andamese school-children on the beach. This is the day that their *wild* parents come to see them ; they arrived this morning in a big canoe, and doubtless brought all kinds of nice, wholesome, dainty edibles for their young people. They are sitting in a circle, whooping and yelling, real *bonâ fide* savages ! Would you like to come out and see them ? ”

“ Certainly not,” exclaimed Mrs. Creery, indignantly.

At this moment they were joined by the General and Captain Rodney, who had just entered the gardens.

“ Have you heard anything more about that fellow, sir ? ” inquired Mr. Lisle.

“ No ; nothing as yet, but Adams and King are doing their best. I fancy he has taken to the bush.”

“ Oh ! then in that case, the Andamese

will soon bring him in," observed Mr. Latimer. "That, or starvation; roots and berries won't keep soul and body together, though many have tried the experiment."

"What! *what* is all this about? What do you mean?" inquired Mrs. Creery, excitedly.

"Oh! rather a bad business at Hadow last night. One of the convicts killed a warder, and has got away," replied the General.

"How did it happen?"

"It seems that this fellow, Aboo Sait, a Mahomedan, has always been an unusually bad lot. A few months ago, he nearly beat out the brains of another convict with his hoe, merely excusing himself on the plea that he was tired of life, and wanted to be hanged. However, as his victim recovered, we were unable to oblige him, and he was heard to say that he would do for a white man next time! Last night, just before they went to section, he was missed, and one of the warders was sent to look for him; but as he did not return, a general search

was made, and the warder was found on his face among the reeds, stabbed through the heart, and Aboo was still missing."

"I'm glad he is on the mainland!" ejaculated Mrs. Creery, with a shudder. "I would not change places with Mrs. Manners for a trifle!"

"Then he is not so desirous of being executed as you imagined," said Mr. Lisle. "He did not give himself up."

"Not he!" rejoined the General. "Life is sweet; his threats meant nothing."

"Perhaps he has gone off to sea," suggested Colonel Denis. "I know they have all a foolish notion that those far-away islands are India, and that the steamboat that brings them here, merely goes round and round for a few days to deceive them,—they being below under hatches."

"No fear of his taking to the water, Colonel," replied the General. "I have put a stop to that little game with the boats, and no convict crew can now take out a boat, unless the owner, or some European, is with them. The rascals went off with no end of

boats, and got picked up at sea as shipwrecked lascars, &c. Two even got so far north as London, in the affecting character of 'castaways.' "

"And how did they fare there?" inquired Helen.

"In princely style, by their own account, they would like to repeat the visit; they were fed and clothed and fêted and supplied with money; they actually went to the theatre, and had their photographs taken—the last a fatal snare—but they were vain! The moment they landed in Bombay, thanks to their photos., the police wanted them, sent them back to us,—and here they are!"

"Yes, the boats were a great temptation; but now they go off on logs," said Mr. Latimer, "and even take to the sea in chains; the Malays, especially, can swim like fish. However, their fellow-convicts are getting too sharp for them: the reward of five rupees puts them on their mettle."

"Too much on their mettle, sometimes!" protested Mrs. Graham, who had joined the group. "Last monsoon, my boatmen nearly

capsized the boat one evening I was returning from church. What between the runaway's struggles to escape, and their determination to land him, once or twice we were all within a point of going over. My screams and expostulations were quite useless!"

"The natives are very sharp after convicts, too," said the General, "and I'll double the reward this time; it's not pleasant to leave such a scoundrel as Aboo Sait loafing round the settlements,—especially as he is *armed*!"

"Miss Denis," turning to Helen, "there is a very singular object in the sky to-night, which I'm sure you have never seen; we call it Moses' Horn. Lisle, you should take her up the hill, and let her see it before it fades. I've a lot of work to do, and I'm going home," (to Helen) "or I would not depute any one to exhibit this rather rare sight."

In compliance with the General's suggestion, Helen and Mr. Lisle left the little gardens together (despite Mrs. Creery's

angry signals to the former), and walked up to the flag-staff, and surveyed the sea and sky, and beheld a long purple streak extending from the south, and pointing as it were directly to the island. It was very sharply defined, and gigantic in size, and had to Helen rather an awful, and supernatural appearance.

"It is shaped like a finger," she said at last. "I never saw anything so strange!"

"Yes, the finger of fate," agreed her companion, "and if I were superstitious, I would say that it was pointing straight at us. Perhaps there may be some remote connection between our planets; perhaps they are identical."

As they stood gazing, the phenomenon gradually melted away before their eyes, and was replaced by the moon, which now rose out of the sea like a huge fire balloon!

"The moon is irrepressible out here," remarked Mr. Lisle, "she seems always to the fore."

“So much the better,” replied Helen, “these Eastern nights are splendid. I wonder, by the way, why the moon has always been spoken of by the feminine gender.”

“As the Lady Moon? Oh! that question is easily answered:—Because she is never the same two days running.”

“Now, Mr. Lisle, I call that rude—a base reflection on my sex. I don’t believe we are half as changeable as yours.

“‘One foot on sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never.’

Pray, to whom does that refer?” and she looked at him interrogatively.

“I could give you a dozen quotations on the other side, but I will spare you; it is my opinion that women are as changeable as weathercocks.”

“An opinion founded on your own experience?”

“Well, no, I am wise; *I* profit by the experience of my friends.”

“Oh!” rather scornfully, “second-hand things are never valuable!”

Mr. Lisle laughed and said, " Well, don't let us quarrel. What did we start with ? Oh ! the moon ;" and gazing over at that orb, he added, " I, too, can repeat poetry, Miss Denis, and this seems just a fitting place to quote.

" 'Larger constellations burning—mellow moons and happy skies ;

Breadths of tropic shade, and palms in clusters—
knots of paradise.' "

This was an apt quotation, and exactly illustrated the scene before them. The loud striking of a clock aroused these two people from a rather reflective silence ; it recalled them sharply from day dreams to the dinner-hour ! And, after a little desultory conversation, they retraced their steps, and rejoined the crowd in the gardens just as the band was playing " God Save the Queen."

CHAPTER XII.

THE WRECK.

‘The direful spectacle of the wreck.’

Tempest.

It may be among the facts not generally known, that the Andaman seas and shores are wealthy in shells; and people who grumble at being despatched to do duty at the settlement are usually consoled by their friends (who are not accompanying them,) saying, “Oh, it’s a charming place! if you have a taste for conchology, you will have any quantity of shelling.”

In most cases, the shelling is angrily repudiated, and yet the chances are, that once arrived upon the scene of action, and stimulated by general example and keen emulation, the new-comers will develop into the most unwearying, rabid, and greedy, of shellers!

When I say a greedy sheller, I refer to an individual who, when tide, wind and moon favours, will secretly take boat, and steal away to the most likely parts of Corvyn's Cove, or some favourite reef at Navy Bay, and there reaping a rich and solitary harvest, return with barefaced triumph, and swagger, dripping up the pier, between two lines of outraged acquaintances, with a shameless air of,—

“ Ah, ha ! see what *I* have got ! ”

From the General, down to Billy Home, every one went shelling at Port Blair, and some of these “shell maniacs” (as Mrs. Creery dubbed them) had superb and valuable collections. There was as much excitement and competition over a day's quest, as would be expended on covert shooting or salmon fishing at home. It was not merely a frivolous picking up of pretty objects ; it was a very serious business. The finder of the rarest shells was the hero of the hour : the owner of “ring” cowries was a person of repute !

Behold, then, one afternoon, a few days after the band, two large rowing-boats waiting at the pier for shellers! and kindly notice the party coming down to embark. An inexperienced eye would naturally assume that they were all going to bathe, for each individual carries a bag and a couple of bath towels—to put round the back of their heads as they stoop in the sun. Their garments are whole, indeed, and quite good enough for the occasion, but how faded, and shrunken, and cockled with sea-water! Their boots—but no, we will draw a veil over these. To be brief, the appearance of the company is the reverse of distinguished. In a few short happy hours they will return: they will be all soaking in water from the waist downwards. (Luckily, wading about in the nice, warm sea is rather pleasant after the first plunge, and people in the excitement of shelling are insiduously drawn in deeper and deeper still.) Yes, by six o'clock, if all goes well, we shall see the company of shellers, returning like a party of half drowned rats; but there will be

no shyness, no reluctance, in their progress up the pier ; without the least diffidence, they will run the gauntlet of all the idlers, with an air of lofty pride, born of the noble spoils they usually carry. Have they not in their bags such treasures as “ woodcocks,” “ stair-cases,” “ tigers,” and “ poached eggs ” ! We spare the reader the Latin names of these rarities.

To-day, the General (a keen sheller,) is going, also Mr. Latimer, Captain Rodney, Dr. Parks, Miss Caggett, Dr. Malone, Colonel Home, Colonel and Miss Denis, and last, but by no means least, Mrs. Creery (and Nip). She does not condescend to shell, but she goes on principle, as she rarely suffers an expedition to leave Ross without her patronage.

Colonel Denis and his daughter came hurrying down, just as the party were about to descend the steps.

“ Good gracious, Helen ! ” cried Mrs. Creery, “ you are never going to shell in

that dress!" speaking exactly as if it were her own property.

"No, no," shaking her head, and exhibiting a small block and paint box. "Have you forgotten that you are to leave me on the wreck to sketch?"

"Oh, true, so we are. Well, get in, *do*! My dear, you are keeping us all waiting."

In another two minutes the boats were full, and rowing away across the water with long, steady strokes; then up the estuary, between the wooded hills of Mount Harriet on one hand, and Hadow—where the lepers were kept—at the other, past the little isle of Chatham, where, according to a legend (for which I will not vouch), eighty convicts were hanged on yon old tree, one May morning, and round the bend, till they were in sight of the wreck, a large three-masted ship, stranded on the muddy shallows, cast away there, by some terrible cyclone as it tore its way up the Bay of Bengal. Her history was unknown, for she was already there when the Andamans were opened up, where she

came from, and what had been the fate of her crew and passengers—would never now be learned. From her rigging, it was guessed that she was of American build,—but that was all.

Even in the brilliant afternoon light, she appeared grey and weird, with her skeleton gear aloft, and her dark, wide-open ports, looking like so many hollow eyes, as she lay among the tall bullrushes, sheathed in seaweed. Her cabins and deck were intact, and she had been used as a hulk in former years, till, being the scene of a ghastly tragedy, and other prisons having been built, she was once more abandoned to the barnacles and the rats. She seemed much larger, and more awe-inspiring at close quarters; and as they rowed under her stern, Helen, in her secret heart, was rather sorry, that she had been so determined to spend two hours upon the wreck alone; that all the way down she had jeered and laughed at Dr. Malone's warnings of cockroaches and ghosts. However, there was no possibility of changing her mind *now*,

especially with Lizzie Caggett's inquiring eyes bent upon her—Lizzie, who was mentally revelling in the prospect of the undivided attentions of all Miss Denis' admirers, for the next two hours !

“Now that it has come to the pinch, I believe you are afraid,” she remarked, with a malicious smile.

The only reply that Helen vouchsafed to this taunt, was by immediately standing up. Greatly to her surprise, Mrs. Creery also rose, saying,—

“I think I'll go with you ! Nip is fond of sniffing among old timber, and he hates shelling, like his mistress.”

No one clamoured against *their* departure, and Helen was for once in her life glad of Mrs. Creery's society, and grateful to Nip. The two ladies were presently helped over the side, (Nip being cautiously carried up by the scruff of his neck,) and the party were left by themselves. To the last, Dr. Malone pressed Helen to “think better of it, a

quarter of an hour will be more than ample, you will see."

At this prophecy, she merely shook her head, and showed her sketch-book.

"I should not wonder if we find you both in the rigging, when we come back!" he shouted, as the boat rowed off, and making a speaking-trumpet of his hands, he added, "she's full of rats!"

As the sound of oars grew fainter and fainter, Helen went to the bows, from whence she hoped to make her sketch, and stood silently looking at the view—at the wooded hills casting deep shadows into the glassy water, at the arm of the sea they had just come up, and out in the open ocean like a green gem in a silver setting—the distant island of Ross. It was undoubtedly, as Mr. Latimer had suggested, a capital place for a sketch, and she must lose no time, and make the most of the light whilst it lasted. So she got out her paint-box and immediately set to work; but,—and here I

appeal specially to artists,—*is* it easy to draw, with a large solar topee thrust over your right shoulder, and a voice perpetually in your ear, saying,—

“Oh, you are not making Ross nearly high enough! Surely that point is never meant for Hopetown? those trees are too far apart; and Chatham is crooked!”

Helen was almost beside herself, every stroke was rudely criticized, and Mrs. Creery emphasized her remarks with her chin, which was nearly as sharp as that of the Duchess in *Wonderland*. At length she turned her attention elsewhere, much to her victim's relief, and began to investigate, and poke about among old spars and rubbish.

After a delightful respite, Helen heard her calling out,—

“I see a little boat coming this way, with two men in it—no, one man is a dog; it's from Navy Bay, and is sure to be Mr. Manners'. I'll wave and beckon him here, for it's very dull for me!”

Accordingly Mrs. Creery's handkerchief

(which was the size of an ordinary towel,) was seen being violently agitated over the side, and met with an immediate response, for the little boat rowed by one man, with one dog passenger, was soon within easy hail.

“I do declare,” cried Mrs. Creery peevishly, “if it is not that odious Mr. Lisle! I never wanted *him*.” However, wanted or not, he was already alongside, looking up at the bulwarks expectantly.

“Oh! it’s you, Mrs. Creery! can I be of any service to you?”

“I thought it was Mr. Manners,” she called down in an aggrieved tone. “I never dreamt of its being *you*! However, you may come up,” speaking precisely as if she were in her own verandah.

Mr. Lisle did not look as if he was going to seize this niggardly invitation; on the contrary, he took a firmer hold of the sculls, glanced over his shoulder, and was evidently about to depart, when Mrs. Creery casually remarked, as if it were a mere afterthought,—

“Oh! by the way, Miss Denis is here too, sketching.”

Apparently this intelligence altered the case, for the gentleman paused, rested on his oars, and said rather nonchalantly,—

“Very well, I shall come aboard—since you wish it so particularly!” and, rowing round, made fast his boat, and was soon on deck, closely followed by a big brown retriever.

“Oh, dear me!” cried Mrs. Creery, lifting up her hands. “So you have brought that nasty dog! he is sure to fight with Nip.”

“Not he, I will be security for his good conduct, And how are you getting on, Miss Denis?” to Helen, who was shyly hiding her drawing with her arm.

“Not at all well; I am not accustomed to sketching, and my attempt here is such a libel on the view, that I am quite ashamed to let you see it, but it” (apologetically,) “seems a pity not to try and take away some recollections of these lovely islands.”

“Yes, you are quite right; and I shall be very glad to give you some photographs, that is, if you would care for them—they don’t give the colours, of course.”

(At this offer Mrs. Creery became rigid, and gave a little warning cough.)

“But,” taking up Helen’s sketch, “this is not at all bad ! Your perspective is a bit out here, and you have not got the right shade in the sea ! ”

“I know it is all frightful ; sea, and land, and sky,” returned Helen, colouring, “I am sure you can draw, Mr. Lisle ; please have the charity to do something to it for me, and make it look less like a thing on a tea-tray,” holding her box, and brushes, towards him as she spoke.

Mr. Lisle, without another word, laid the block upon the bulwarks, gazed for a moment at the scene, and then dashed in two or three effective strokes, with what even Mrs. Creery (who had, of course, followed up the sketch,) could see was a master’s hand.

Helen’s pale, meek, school-girl attempt received in three minutes, another complexion ; with a few rapid touches, a glow of the setting sun lit up the sky, and threw out in bold relief the dark promontory of Mount

Harriet ; a touch to the sea and it became sea, (no longer mere green paper), palms, and gurgeon trees, appeared as if by magic ; Helen had never seen anything like the transformation. She almost held her breath as she gazed—not quite so closely as the elder lady, whose topee was in its old place ;—why, the drawing-master at Miss Twigg's, could not paint a quarter as well as Mr. Lisle ; who now looked at the view, with his head on one side, and then glanced at Helen, amused at the awe and admiration depicted on her countenance.

“ Yes, *that's* more like it ! ” cried Mrs. Creery, encouragingly. “ I told you, you know,” to Helen, “ that your sea was too green, and flat, and your perspective all wrong ! I know a good deal about drawing myself.” (May she be forgiven for this fable !)
“ My sister, Lady Grubb, is a beautiful artist, and has done some lovely Decalcomanie vases ; but *you* paint very nicely, too, Mr. Lisle, really quite as well as most drawing-masters ! ”
Then, looking suddenly round, “ but all this

time where is Nip? I do believe that he has followed that horrible brute of yours down into the cabins !”

“ Not at all likely, Mrs. Creery, you know that they are not affinities ; Nip has followed his own inquisitive impulses, for Hero,” moving aside, “ is here.”

“ Well, where can he be ? ‘ Nip, Nip, Nip ? ’ ” walking away in search of her treasure.

“ He is not *lost*, at any rate,” muttered Mr. Lisle, “ no such luck.” Then, in a louder tone, “ Is not this a strange, out-of-the-world place ? ” to Helen, who was watching his busy brush, with childlike interest. “ If I had been suddenly asked about the Andamans, a couple of years ago, I should have been puzzled to say whether they were a place, a family of that name, or something to *eat*,—wouldn’t you ? ”

“ Not quite so bad as that,” smiling.

“ Oh, of course, pardon me—I forgot that you are a young lady of most unusual information.”

“No, no, no, I knew nothing about them, I candidly confess, till papa came here.”

“They certainly well repay a visit,” continued her companion, painting away steadily as he spoke, “there is a sort of Arcadian simplicity, a kind of savage solitude, an absence of worry, and not the slightest hurry about anything, that has wonderful charms for me.”

“Then I suppose you are naturally lazy, and would like to bask in the sun all day, and have one person to brush away the flies, and another to do your thinking.”

“Miss Denis,” suddenly looking up at her, with mock indignation, “you speak as if you were alluding to one of the animals of the lower creation;—what have I done to deserve this? I deny the impeachment of laziness. ‘Coming, sir,’ my servant, will testify that I am out every morning at half-past five; neither am I idle, but I like to spend my time in my own way, not to be driven hither and thither by dinner gongs, and railway bells, and telegrams. I like to pull my neck out from under the social yoke,—to carry out

your uncomplimentary simile, and figuratively, to graze a bit ! ”

Helen made no reply, but leant her chin on her hand, and looked down abstractedly at the water for some time ; twice her companion glanced up, and saw that she was still buried in reflection. At last he said, “ I would not presume to purchase your thoughts, Miss Denis, but perhaps you will be so generous as to share them with me ? ”

“ You might not like them ! Some of them were about yourself,” and she laughed rather confusedly.

“ And may I not ascertain whether I approve of them or not ? ”

“ You may, if you will promise not to be offended.”

“ I promise in the most solemn manner ; I swear by bell, book, and candle ; and I am very much honoured that you should think of me *at all* ! ”

“ You are laughing at me, Mr. Lisle,” she said, colouring vividly ; divining a lurking sarcasm in this speech.

“I am dumb, and indeed I have no business to criticize you even in my thoughts, much less to your face ! ”—

“Speak out plainly, Miss Denis,” he interrupted eagerly ; “let me have your views, good and bad, or bad alone.”

“It is very presumptuous in me I know—I am only a girl, and you are a great deal older than I am—but it seems to me, that every one has some place of their own in the world allotted to them—some special duty to fulfil—” here her listener glanced at her sharply, but her eyes were bent unconsciously on the water, and she did not note his gaze—“surely it is scarcely right, to shirk one’s share of all the toil, and the struggling in the outer world, and the chances of helping one’s fellow-creatures, in ways however small,—just for the selfish pleasure of being securely moored from all annoyances, among these sleepy islands ! ”

She stopped, and looked up at him rather timidly, with considerably heightened colour, and added, in answer to his unusually grave face, and stare of steadfast surprise,—

“ I can see that you think me a very impertinent girl, and will never speak to me again ; but you *would* have my thoughts, and there they are, just as they entered my head ! ”

“ I think you are a brave and noble young lady, Miss Denis, and you have taught me a lesson that I shall certainly take to heart. I came here for six weeks, and have stayed nearly six months, enjoying this lotus-eating existence, oblivious of my place in the world, and my duty,—and I *have* duties elsewhere ; thank you for reminding me of them, and indeed my relations are beginning to think that I am lost, or have fallen a prey to cannibals.”

Here was Mr. Lisle speaking of his belongings and his plans for once,—oh, why was not Mrs. Creery on the spot ?

However, she was not far off, and her shrill cry of “ Nip, Nip, Nip ! where are you, Nip ? ” was coming nearer and nearer.

CHAPTER XIII.

“BLUE BEARD’S CHAMBER.”

“I doubt some danger does approach you nearly.”

Macbeth.

“HE must be in the saloon!” cried Mrs. Creery. “I’ve hunted the whole ship, and I’m sure he has gone down. You,” to Mr. Lisle, “will have to go after him; I dare not, it looks so dark.”

To explore the rat-haunted cabins of this old hulk in search of “Nip,” was by no means an errand to Mr. Lisle’s taste; he would infinitely have preferred to remain sketching on the bulwarks, and conversing with Helen Denis. However, of course he had no alternative. Go he must! Somewhat to his surprise, the young lady said,—

“I shall go too; the ports are open, there

will be plenty of light, and I want to investigate the cabins downstairs."

"You had much better not, mind! you will only dirty your dress," urged Mrs. Creery dissuasively, but Helen's slim white figure, had already vanished down the companion-ladder, in the wake of Mr. Lisle.

At first it was as dark as Erebus—after coming out of the glare above—but as their eyes became accustomed to the gloom, there was sufficient light from the open stern windows, to show that they were standing in a long narrow saloon, with numerous cabins at either side.

"It looks quite like the steamer I came out in!" exclaimed the young lady. (Anything but a compliment to a first-class P. and O.) "That is to say, the length and shape. There are tables, too!" (These had not been worth removing, and were fastened to the floor.)

"It was used as a prison long ago, I believe," said Mr. Lisle.

"Yes, and—"

Helen was about to add that murder had been done there, but something froze the sentence on her lips ; it seemed scarcely the time and place to speak of *that*.

"Nip, Nip, Nip!" cried his infatuated mistress, who had cautiously descended to the foot of the stairs, holding her petticoats tightly swathed round her. "Where are you, you naughty dog? Ah!" shrieking and skipping surprisingly high, "I'm *sure* that was a rat!"

"Not at all unlikely," rejoined Mr. Lisle, rattling noisily along the wainscot with a bit of stick—whilst Mrs. Creery hurriedly withdrew up half a dozen steps, where she remained plaintively calling "Nip, Nip, Nip!" Miss Denis had meanwhile been looking out of the stern windows on the now moonlit water, the tall bulrushes, and the wooded shores ; and here in a few moments, she was joined by her fellow-explorer, who was examining something in his hand.

"See what I have found!" he said. "When I was hammering the old boarding

just now, a plank fell away, and this thing rolled out. I believe," wiping it in his handkerchief as he spoke, and tendering it for her inspection, "that it is a woman's ring."

"A ring! so it is," returned Helen; "and it looks like gold."

"Oh, yes! it's gold right enough, I fancy, and must have belonged to one of the passengers of this ship."

"I wonder who wore it last," turning it over. "I wish it could speak and tell us its history, and how many years it is since it was lost."

"It was a woman's ring; you see it would only just fit my little finger," observed Mr. Lisle, putting it on as he spoke, "now try it on yours." Helen slipped it on—it fitted perfectly.

"It is an old Posey or betrothal ring,—at any rate it resembles one that my mother used to wear!"

"Helen and Mr. Lisle! what are you doing?" screamed Mrs. Creery. "You are chattering away there, and not helping me one bit." She was standing on the

ladder exactly as they had left her. “You have never searched in the cabins! He may be shut up in one of them; try those opposite, Helen! Do you hear me?”

Thus recalled to their duty, Mr. Lisle now undertook to inspect one side of the saloon, and his companion the other.—All the compartments that Helen had examined were empty so far,—but she came at last to one, —with a closed door!

“Take care! it may be Blue Beard’s closet,” suggested Mr. Lisle facetiously, as he looked in and out of cabins in his own neighbourhood.

Helen laughed, turned the handle and entered, the moon shone clear through the paneless port, and showed her a cabin exactly similar to the others—just two wooden worm-eaten bunks, and that was all. Behind the door—ah! a little song she was humming, died away upon her lips, and she uttered a stifled exclamation, as her startled eyes fell upon a tall, powerful man in convict’s dress, in short, no less a person than Aboo Sait! In a twinkling, his grasp was on her throat,

crushing her savagely against the wall. Vain indeed were her struggles, he was strangling her with iron hands; his fierce, turbaned face, was within an inch of hers, she felt his hot breath upon her cheek! She could not scream or move, her hands fell nerveless at her sides, her sight was failing, hearing seemed to be the only sense that had not deserted her! she could distinctly catch the faint, irregular lapping of the water against the old ship's sides, and Mrs. Creery's querulous voice calling "Nip, Nip, Nip!" whilst *she* was dying!

"Well, have you found Blue Beard or Nip?" demanded Mr. Lisle, pushing back the door as he spoke. "Good God!"

In another instant, she was released; she breathed again. That awful grip was off her throat, for with one well-delivered blow Aboo's prey was wrenched from his grasp, and he himself, sent staggering across the cabin, but his repulse was merely momentary; the convict was armed with a knife;—*the* knife,—in a second it shone in his hand, and

with a tigerish bound he flung himself on the new comer.

And now within the narrow space of that cabin, commenced such a struggle for life and death as has seldom been witnessed. Mr. Lisle was a middle-sized, well-made, athletic Englishman, endowed with iron muscles, and indomitable pluck—but he was over-matched by the convict, in bone and weight. Aboo was six foot two, as wiry as a panther, as lithe as a serpent, and all his efforts were edged by the fatal fact, that *he* had everything to gain, and everything to lose!

The issue of this conflict meant to him, liberty, and his very existence on one hand, and Viper Island, and the gibbet, on the other.—Win he must,—since the stake was his LIFE!

They wrestle silently to and fro, finally out of the cabin, locked in a deadly embrace. The Englishman, though stabbed in the arm, had succeeded in clutching the convict's right wrist, so that for the moment, that sharp gleaming weapon is powerless! Aboo,

on his side, holds his antagonist in a wolfish grip by the throat—they sway, they struggle, they slide and stagger, on the oozy floor of the saloon. At the moment, the advantage is with Aboo Sait—if he gets the chance, he will strangle this Feringhee devil, and cut the throat of that white-faced girl,—who is still leaning against the cabin wall, faint and breathless !

But he has not reckoned on another female ! A female, who has ceased to call “Nip, Nip, Nip, Nip,” and has now rushed up on deck with out-stretched arms, shrieking, “Murder ! murder ! murder !”

“Fly, save yourself !” gasped Mr. Lisle to Helen, at the expense of an ugly wound in the neck ; she cannot fly ; a kind of hideous spell holds her to the spot, gazing on the scene before her, with eyes glazed with horror. Her very hair seems rising from her head, for she is perfectly certain, that murder will be done ; the convict will kill Mr. Lisle, and *she* will be an involuntary witness of the awful deed ! And yet she cannot move, nor shake

off this frightful nightmare : she is, as it were, chained to her place. But hark ! her ears catch distant singing, and the rise and fall of oars. This familiar noise is the signal of her release—the spell is broken.

"They are coming, they are coming!" she screamed, and rushed upstairs, calling "Help ! help ! help !" She sees the boats approaching steadily in the moonlight, but, alas ! their occupants are so entirely engrossed in chaunting "Three Blind Mice," that her agonized signals, and Mrs. Creery's piercing cries, are apparently, unnoticed ! And whilst they are singing, *what* is being done in that dark cabin down below ? She thought with sickening horror, of those two struggling figures, of that gleaming, merciless knife, and hurried once more to the head of the stairs. As she did so, she heard the sound of a heavy fall, and in another moment, fear thrown to the winds, she was in the saloon.

Mr. Lisle had slipped upon the slimy boards, made a valiant effort to recover, but, overborne by the convict's superior weight, he

fell, still locked in that iron embrace. In the fall, the weapon had flown out of Aboo's hand,—but only a short way, it was within easy reach; and now, Gilbert Lisle, your hour has come! He sees it in the criminal's face, he knows that his life is to be reckoned by seconds, and yet his eye, as it meets that malignant gaze, never quails, though it seems a hard fate to perish thus, in this old hulk, and at the hands of such a ruffian! With his knee pressed down upon his victim's chest, a murderous smile upon his face, Aboo stretched out a long, hairy, cruel arm, to seize the knife, just as Helen reached the foot of the ladder. Like lightning, she sprang forward, pounced on it, snatched at it, secured it—and running down the cabin, flung it far into the sea, which it clave with one silvered flash, and then sank.

Miss Denis was not nearly so much frightened now,—nay, she felt comparatively brave since *that* was gone. She heard the near sound of voices, and a noise of many steps

hurrying downstairs. There was a desperate struggle. In three minutes Aboo, once more a prisoner, with his arms bound in his turban, was led up on deck, cursing and howling and spitting like a wild cat. Here we behold Mrs. Creery, the centre of an anxious circle, volubly narrating a story in which the personal pronoun "I" is frequently repeated; and Helen, quite broken down, and trembling from head to foot, clinging to her father, looking the picture of cowardice, as at the same moment Mrs. Creery might have sat for the portrait of "Bellona" herself.

Miss Caggett (who had had a most satisfactory afternoon) approached the former, and examined her curiously.—She was scarcely able to speak, and was shaking like a leaf, and at this instant the General and Dr. Malone came up from the saloon, followed by Mr. Lisle minus his hat, his coat in rags, and his arm in a sling. Every one looked at him for a moment in silence, and then a torrent of words broke forth—words conveying wonder, sympathy, and praise.

But he, scarcely noticing the crowd, went straight up to Colonel Denis, and said, "Sir, I suppose you know that your daughter has just saved my life?"

"I—I—did not," he replied, astounded at this rather abrupt address, "I thought it was the other way—that you saved hers!"

"That fellow nearly strangled her; I'm afraid she got a fearful shock."

"Miss Denis," addressing her in a lower voice, "words seem but feeble things after such a deed as yours; but believe me, that I shall never forget what your courage, and presence of mind, have done for me to-day."

"No, no," she answered in a choked voice, shaking her head, "it was you—*you*." More she could not utter, as the recollection of her recent ordeal flashed before her, when Aboo had his deadly clutch upon her throat. She turned away, and hiding her face against her father's arm, burst into tears.

"What a queer, hysterical creature!" remarked Miss Caggett, *sotto voce* to Dr.

Malone. "All this fuss, just because Mr. Lisle caught a convict, and the convict tore his coat!"

"I think there was more in it than that," objected her listener. "The man nearly strangled her, and he was armed; somehow she got hold of the knife, and threw it away. The story is all rather confused as yet—but she is an uncommonly plucky girl!"

"She *looks* it," returned Lizzie with a malicious giggle.

"And," continued Dr. Malone, not noticing her interruption, "as for Lisle, I always knew that he was a splendid chap."

This speech was not palatable to Miss Caggett; she tossed her head and replied,—

"I see nothing splendid about him; and for that matter, Mrs. Creery says that she saved everybody—"

"Oh, of course," ironically. "I can tell you this much, that it's well for Mrs. Creery that it was not an elegant, indolent fop that happened to be aboard, like her friend Mr. James Quentin; if *he* had fallen foul of Aboo, Aboo would have made short work of

him with his flaccid muscles and portly figure; it was ten to one on the convict, an exceptionally powerful man—he was desperate, like a wolf in a cage, and he was armed. However, Lisle is as hard as nails, and a very determined fellow, and whatever Mrs. Creery may choose to say, we owe her valuable life to *him*.”

“He managed to save his own too,” snapped Lizzie, as if she rather regretted the circumstance.

“Yes, but he has got a couple of very ugly deep cuts.—One of them dangerously near the jugular!”

“It strikes me, as a very curious fact, that within the last two months Mr. Lisle and Miss Denis have been concerned in two most thrilling adventures: they were nearly drowned coming from North Bay—at least so *she* says—and now they have been all but murdered, a remarkable coincidence, and really very funny.”

“Funny! Miss Caggett. I think it would scarcely strike any one else, in a humorous

light ; it was a mere chance, and a lucky one for Miss Denis, that she had Lisle to stand by her on both occasions."

" She is welcome to him, as far as I'm concerned," retorted the young lady, waspishly.

Dr. Malone grinned, and thought of "sour grapes," and wondered if Miss Denis was equally welcome, to Apollo Quentin ?

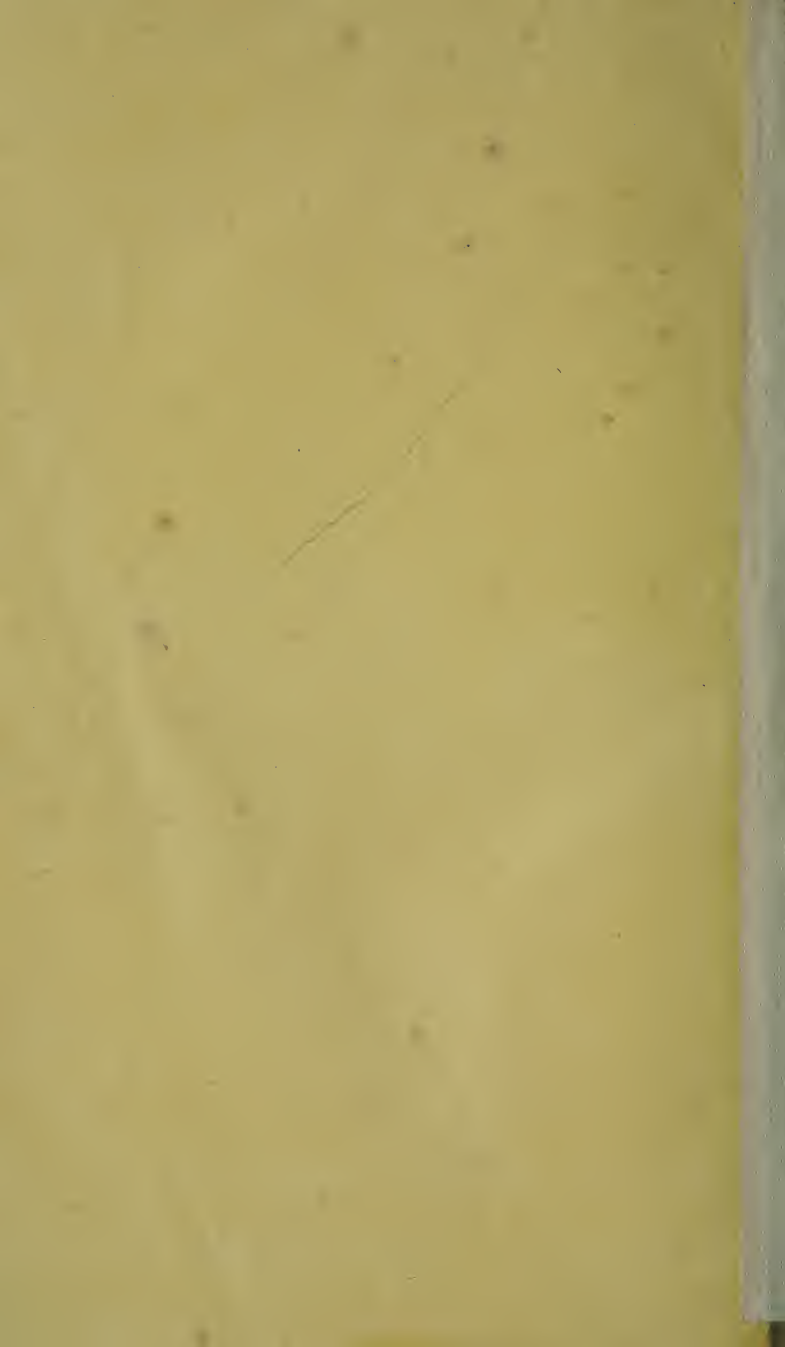
All the shelling party were now assembled about the deck, awaiting a boat, which had been signalled for from Viper, to take charge of the criminal. Mrs. Creery was still volubly expounding to one or two listeners ; Helen was sitting down with her face well averted from the direction of Aboo, who, guarded by brother-prisoners (boatmen), stood near the bulwarks, looking the very incarnation of impotent fury, and sullen despair. His late opponent remained somewhat aloof from the crowd, talking to Mr. Latimer ; he bore evident traces of the recent deadly struggle, and leant against the weather-beaten wheel-house, as if he was glad of its support. It was many a year since the deck

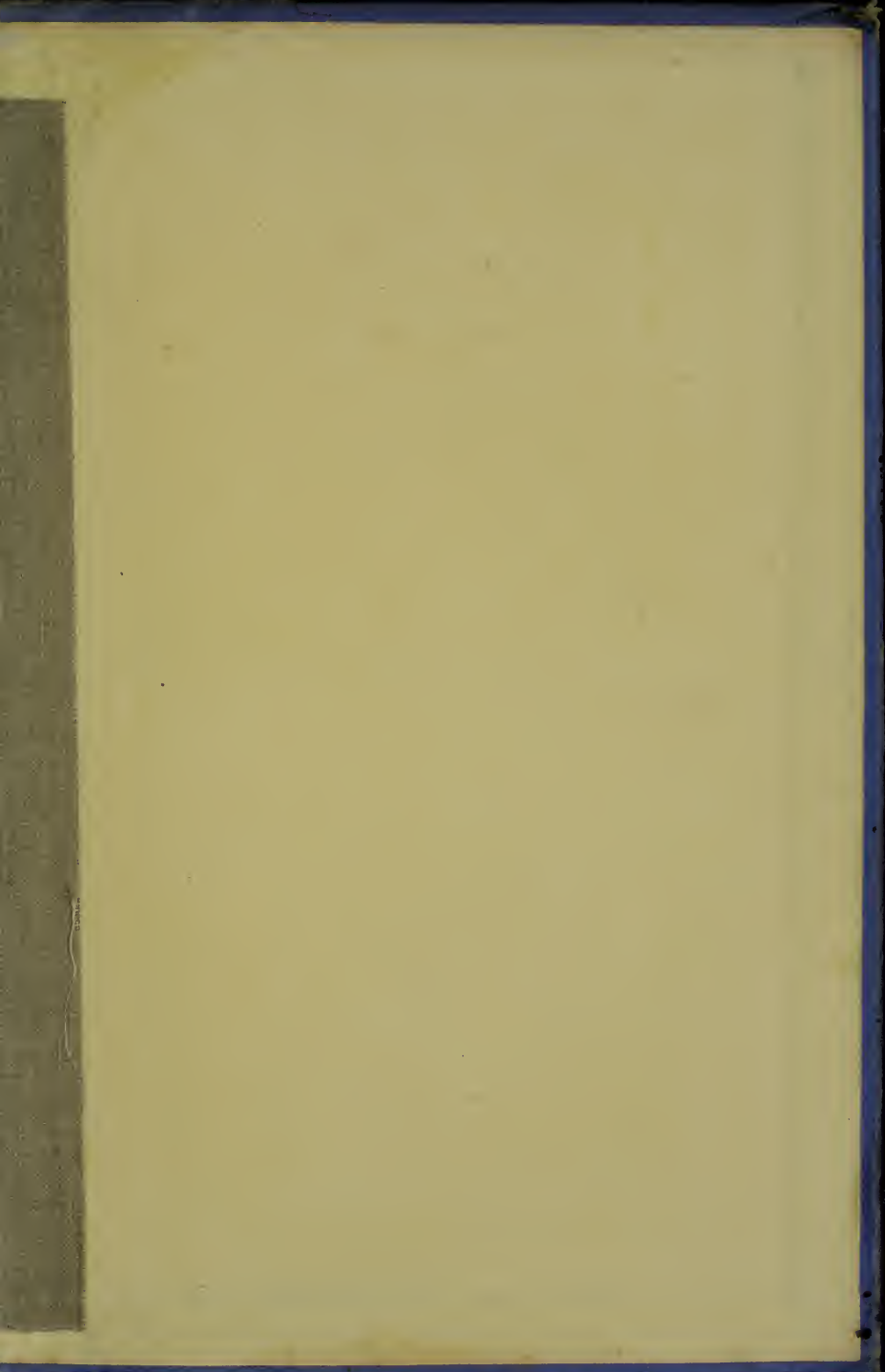
of the old wreck had carried such a crowd of passengers. After a considerable delay, the expected boat and warders arrived, and the writhing, gibbering criminal, was despatched in chains to Viper, having previously made several frantic efforts to throw himself into the sea.—Mr. Lisle departed in his own little skiff, accompanied by Dr. Malone, and the brown dog, and the remainder of the company re-embarked and rowed back to Ross in unwonted silence; there was no more singing, and even Mrs. Creery was unusually piano. Nip, the immediate cause of the search, and the strife, and who had appeared in quite a casual manner at the last moment,—now sat in his mistress's lap, the picture of dignified satisfaction—undoubtedly *he* considered himself the hero of the hour.

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